

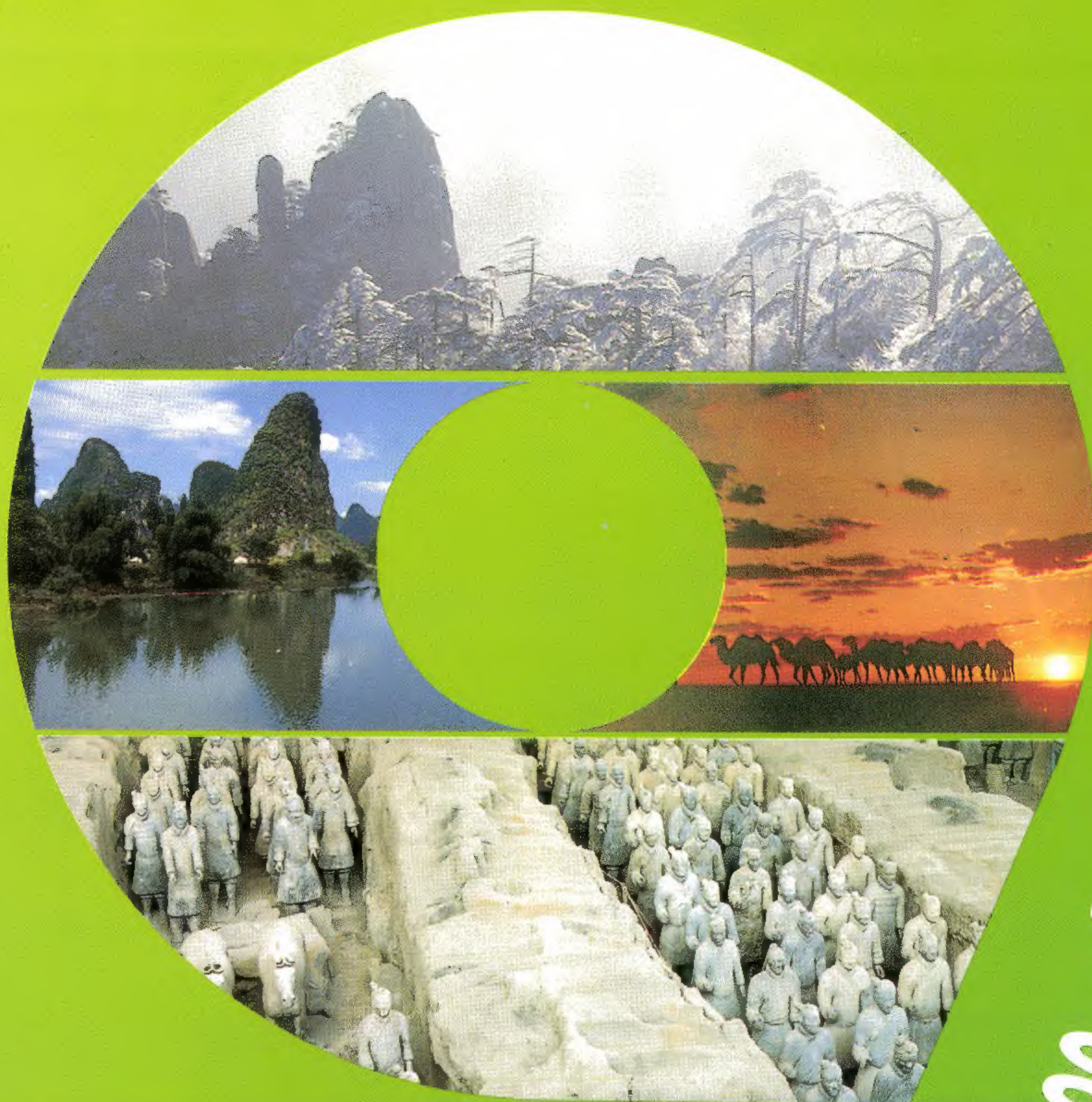
TOURISM



120

SOUTHWESTERN SILK ROAD (II)

LINGGUAN ROUTE (II) • YONGCHANG ROUTE • SCENES ON AN ANCIENT ROAD



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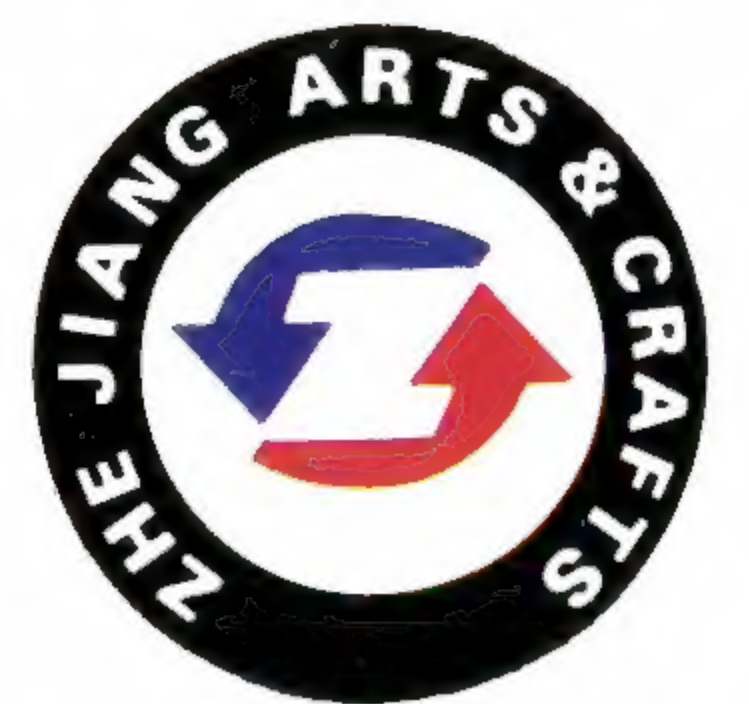
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E D I T O R I A L

Where China Meets Burma

Our Special Features articles this month continue the story of the Southwestern Silk Road, so little known despite its antiquity; it is believed to have been in existence by the fourth century B.C. Our special correspondent introduces the second, southerly half of the Lingguan Route, which ran from Chengdu in the Sichuan Basin to Dali in Yunnan, as well as its western continuation, the Yongchang Route, as far as the Sino-Burmese border. The landscapes are varied, the climate mild, even subtropical, and the people — or rather peoples (among others, the Yi, Bai, Dai, Hui, Lisu, Jingpo, Achang and Dêrnang) — quite fascinating.

Marco Polo was certainly fascinated when he passed this way in the last few decades of the thirteenth century on a mission for his Yuan imperial patron, Kublai Khan, which took him to Burma and the northeastern part of the Indian subcontinent. Not only his own observations about Kara-jang (Yunnan) but also sundry anecdotes were immortalized in *The Travels*, a record of his adventures which left many European readers unsure how much was fact, how much fiction.

Chinese travellers too, such as the Tang-dynasty monk Xuan Zang and Xu Xiake, the Ming-dynasty geographer, have left records of what they saw in this region on the outer margins of the Han Chinese world. A region reputed at one time to be so dangerous and unhealthy that many a Chinese from the Central Plains, on being ordered to go there, would first order his wife to re-marry and otherwise prepare for death!

Such precautions are of course no longer necessary, but non-Chinese travellers planning a trip in southwestern Yunnan should check the 'open' status of their destination carefully, as the situation is changing all the time.

The Grand Photo Contest in honour of our approaching tenth anniversary of publication closed on May 20. The response has been excellent. Entries are currently being sorted and selected, and the results will be published in CHINA TOURISM no. 122, which appears in mid-August. Watch out for them!



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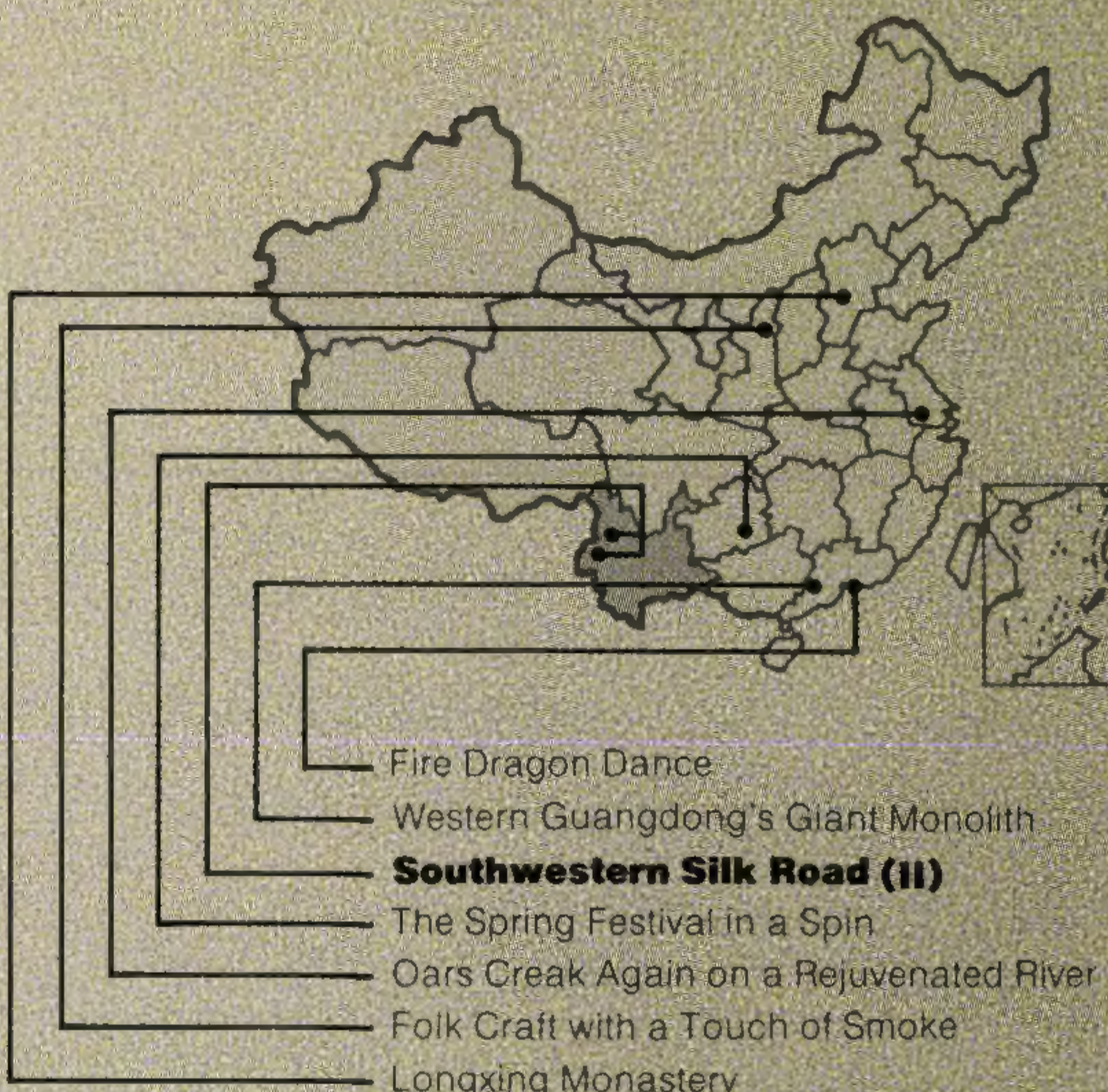


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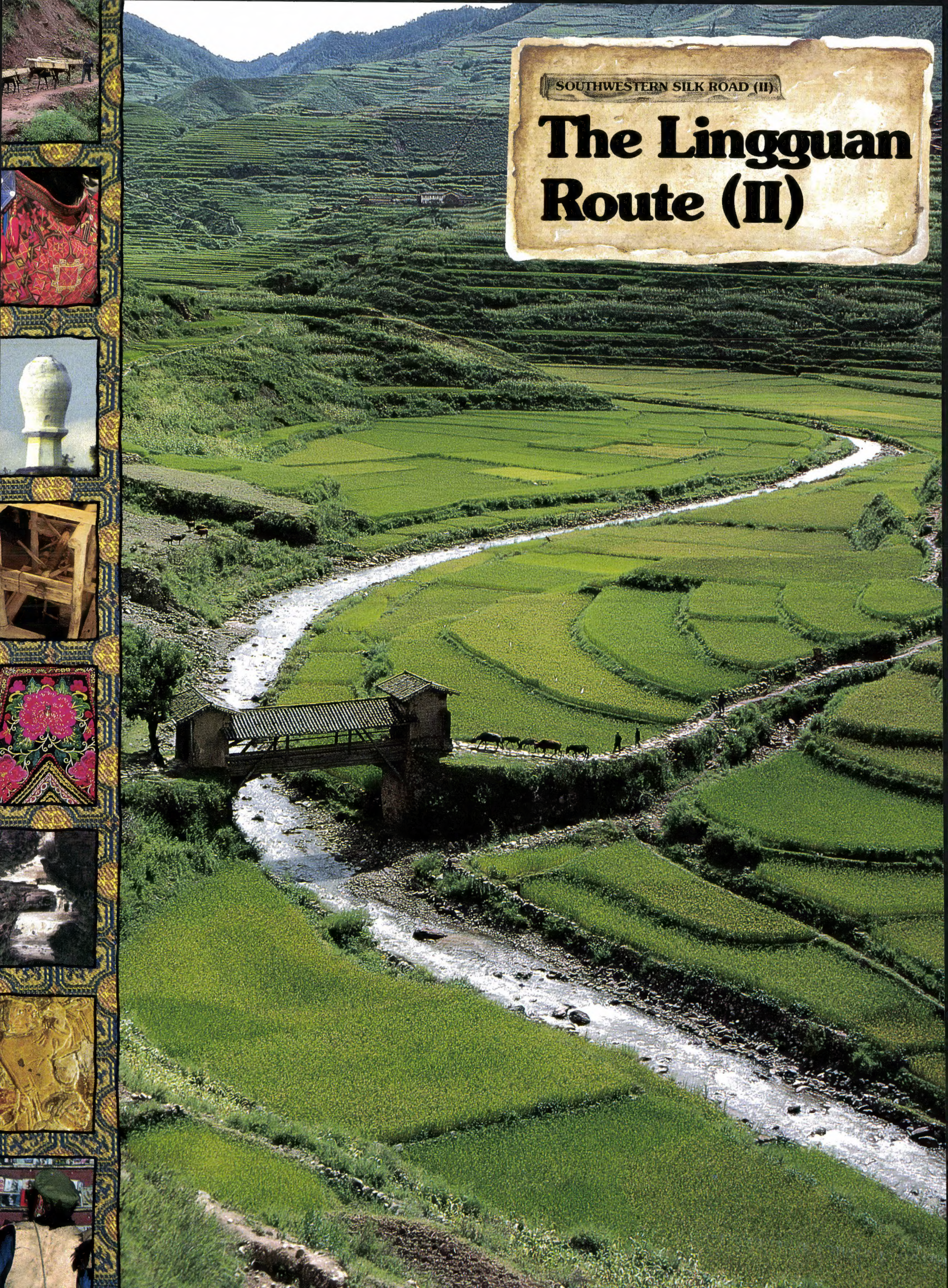
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SOUTHWESTERN SILK ROAD (II)

The Lingguan Route (II)



Salt and Stupas

ARTICLE BY XU YE

Once across the River Jinsha, the Southwestern Silk Road — more specifically, the Lingguan Route, the northern half of which we covered in last month's issue — continues south and west through Yunnan Province.

We decided against crossing the River Jinsha (the upper course of the great Yangtse) at the usual point, Panzhihua. There are still a number of ferry crossings to choose from, and there were around thirty-six in

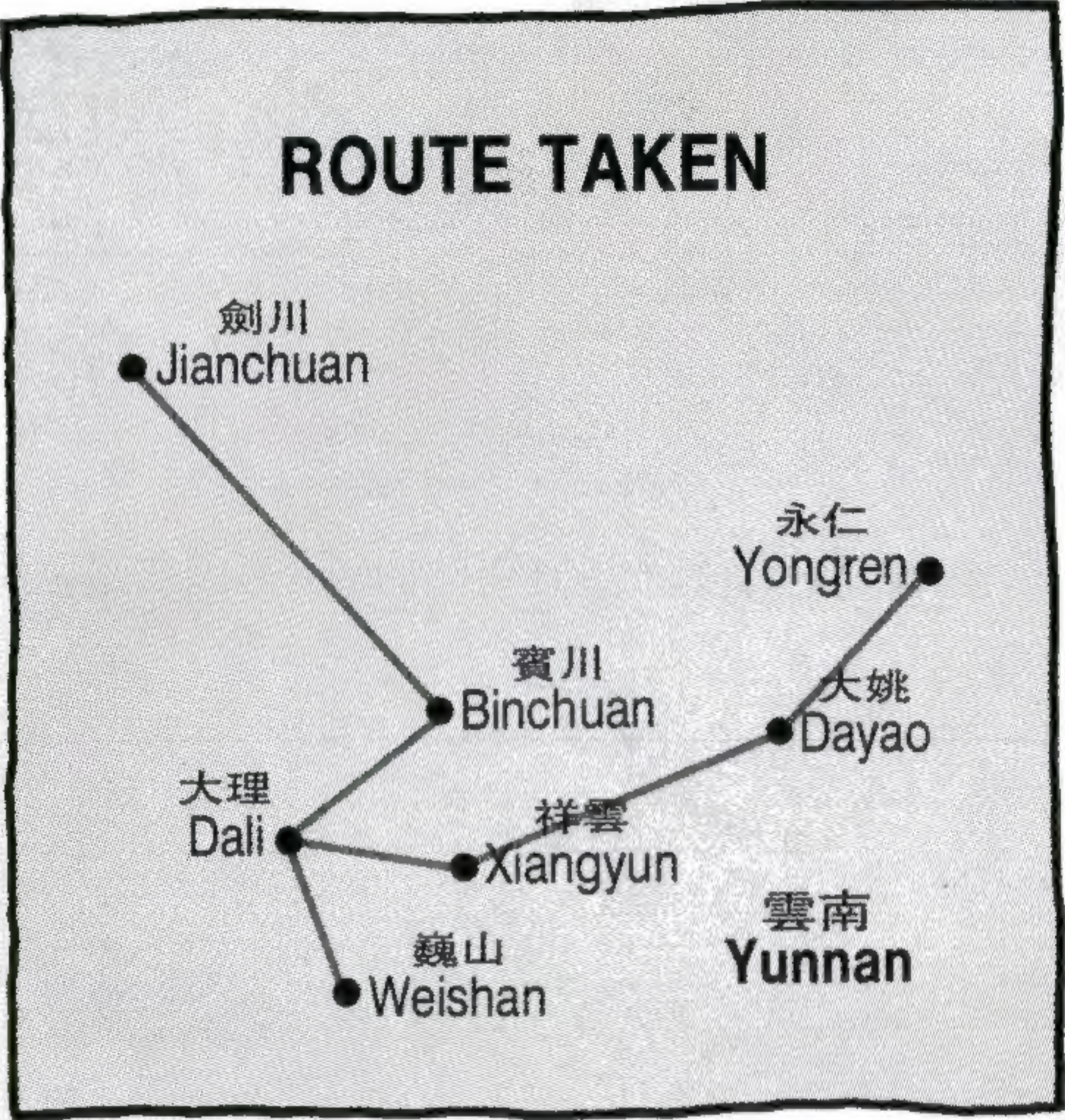


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the old days of the Lingguan Route. The best-known crossing was at the Lazha Ferry and that was the one we used ourselves.

As the ferry boat rocked across the river, I stood at the bow and found myself remembering the strange tale of how Kublai Khan and his troops succeeded in crossing at this very point. The story goes that, when the founder of the Yuan dynasty (1271–1368) was pursuing the remaining troops of the Southern Song (1127–1279), he found his way barred by the turbulent Jinsha. The current was too strong for his cavalry's horses, and for a while he was at his wit's end. But then he met a local man who suggested that he should kill the horses and make rafts with their hide in order to continue his pursuit across the river. This he did, and the event was duly recorded in the history books. However, we are not told how the Mongol army — horsemen practically since birth, one and all — got on without their mounts. Somehow one cannot imagine the Golden Horde on foot!

The ancient road wound through farmlands and across brooks (1, by Tse Shi Fan), while the rivers were conquered by ferry — here a scene at the Lazha Ferry on the Jinsha (2, by Wang Miao).



Yongren

is a military plan carved on a cliff on the mountain. It is said to show a famous manoeuvre invented by Zhuge Liang (181-234), the renowned strategist of the Kingdom of Shu (221-263) of the Three Kingdoms Period.

Also in the vicinity is a saddleback called Waduanlu (Route Breakage). It is said that, when Zhuge Liang's expedition to the south



On the southern bank of the Jinsha lies Yongren County. The lifestyle of the Yi people in the village of Zhiju here is quite different from those living in the Greater and Lesser Liangshan Mountains, which now lay behind us in Sichuan. The local dress, for instance, is far more colourful. This area is all part of the Chuxiong Yi Autonomous Prefecture. There are around thirty branches of Yi people, linked by their language. To reach the village, we drove as far as we could by road, then walked for several hours along a flagstoned path. The flagstones were polished smooth, the result, I was told, of the constant human, horse and mule traffic along the path over centuries. This traffic continues today.

I suddenly spotted a train of dozens of mules trotting down the slopes in the distance. Heavily laden with timber, the mules seemed quite small. Urged on by drovers, they were on their way to a nearby fair, where their load would be sold.

Northeast of Yongren itself lies Mount Fangshan, on which many a relic connected with the ancient trade route is preserved. We ourselves passed various ruins, possibly the remains of army barracks. I was told that there



was jeopardized by an outbreak of the plague among his troops, he ordered a ditch to be dug here to prevent the sickness from spreading further. Legend says that the ditch 'cut off' or 'broke the route' of the epidemic in mystical terms, hence the name. Today the Sichuan-Yunnan Highway passes right through this curious place.

Dayao

the legend also spread, reaching Kunming, capital of Yunnan Province, where the mythical creatures were said to have originated in Lake Dianchi. They are now the emblems of Kunming.

We had come to southwestern China with the aim of learning more about the Southwestern Silk Road. Though we failed to find any traces of the 'golden horse' or 'azure rooster' there, we did see some historical relics in Dayao County, which used to be a staging post in this area



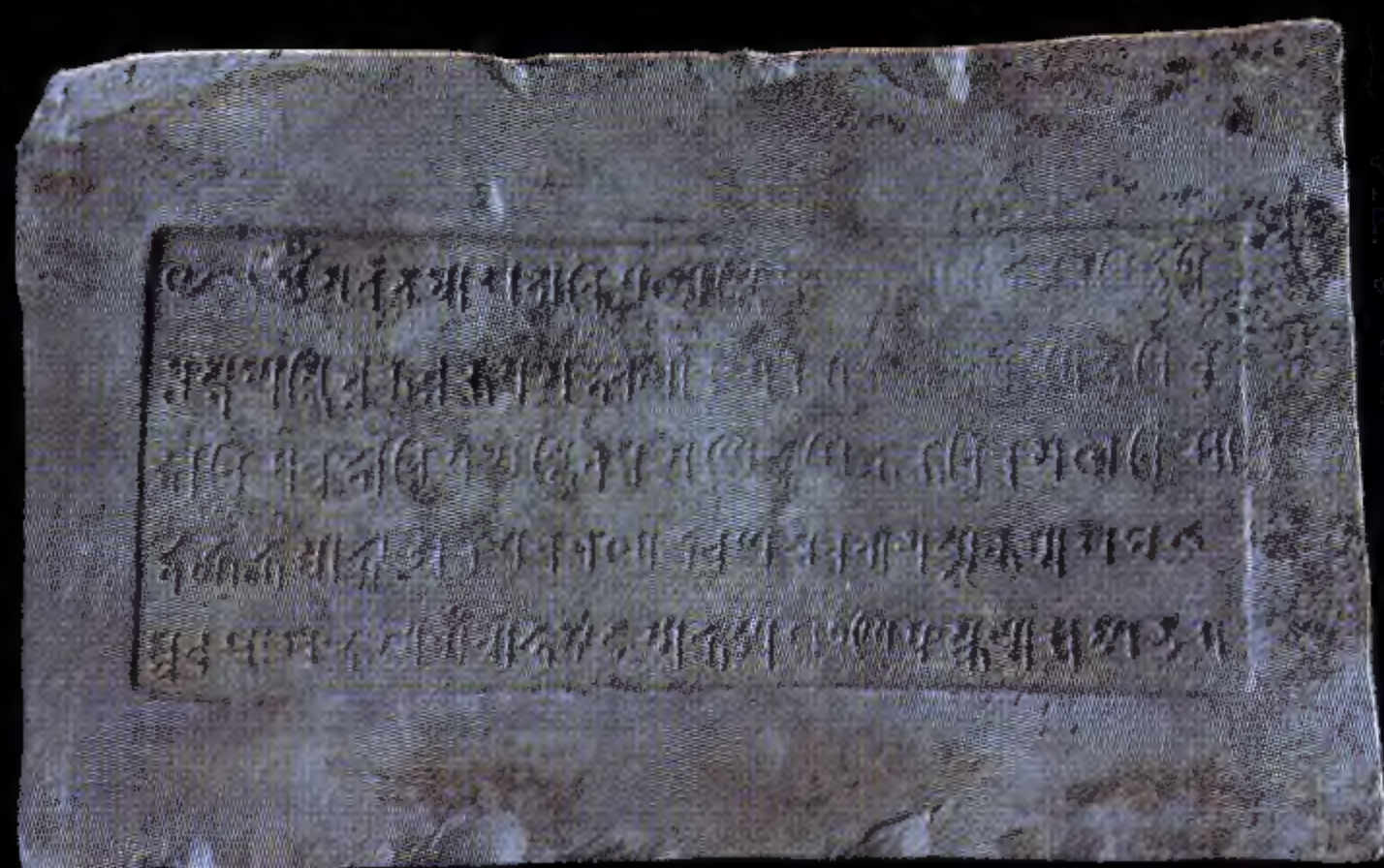
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After the Southwestern Silk Road was opened up by Emperor Wudi of the Western Han dynasty (206 B.C.–A.D. 24) with the subsequent setting up of many counties and prefectures, communications improved rapidly. As a result, treasures from the southwest gradually made their way to the capital, then at Chang'an (present-day Xi'an in Shaanxi), as tribute to the emperor, among them large ingots of gold and pure jade.

Even more fascinating for the dignitaries at court was that some returning travellers embroidered tales of what they had seen along the road, talking of a 'golden horse' and an 'azure rooster' which could be heard neighing and crowing, respectively, in the mountains of Dayao County. As peoples migrated and as cultural exchanges increased, so

where Sichuan and Yunnan meet. West of the county seat, atop Mount Wenbi, stands a white stupa known as the Qingchui Dagoba. This type of Buddhist structure is fairly rare in China. Built during the late Tang dynasty (618–907), it is eighteen metres high and bulges at the top, rather like the head of a match. Four niches, now empty, would once each have contained a statue of Buddha.

We found a few bits of broken brickwork lying at the dagoba's foot carved with inscriptions in both Chinese and Sanskrit. Apparently, the dagoba surface had been covered with an entire Buddhist sutra, witness to the existence of the Theravada or Hinayana Sect in western Yunnan, introduced from Burma.



4

The exotic Yi dress of Yongren County (1). A mule train brings timber down from the mountains (2); in many places, the old road is now a modern asphalted highway (5, by Wang Miao). The Qingchui Dagoba at Dayao (3) with inscriptions in Chinese and Sanskrit (4) (1–4 by Tse Shi Fan).



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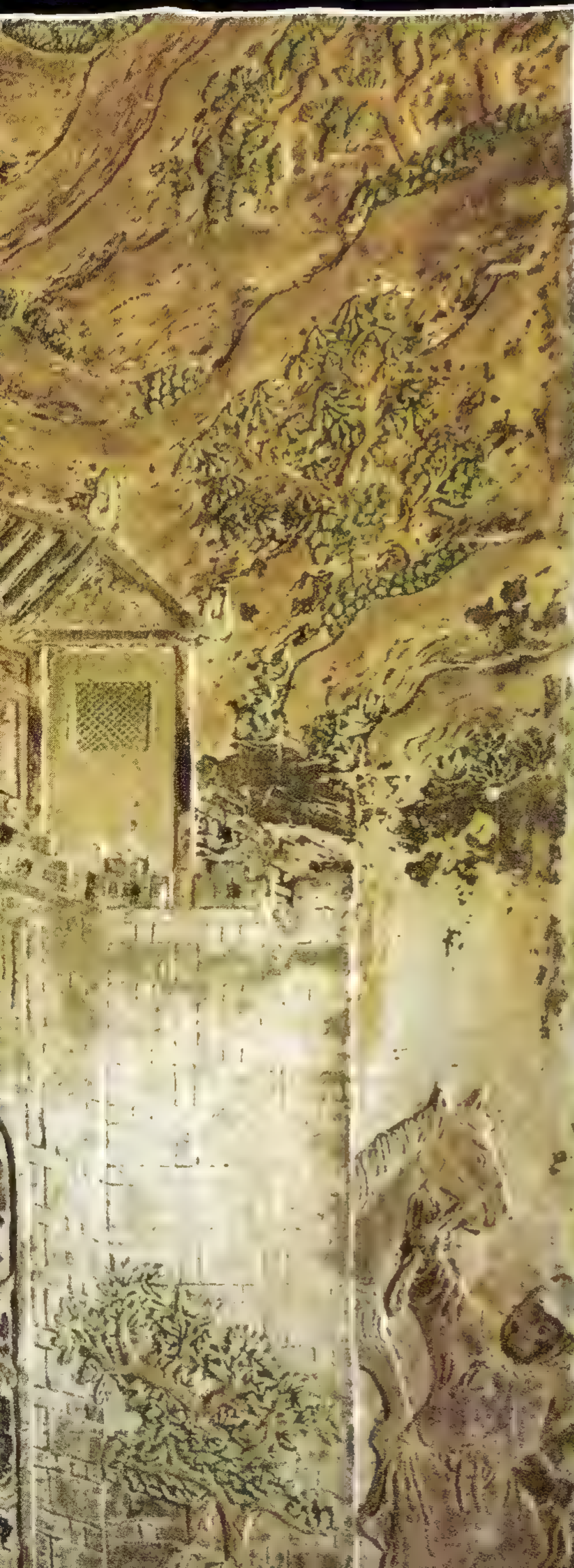


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The little town of Shiyang in the northwest of Dayao County is famous for its salt. For more than two thousand years, according to historical records, salt production has thrived here, representing an important source of commerce along the Southwestern Silk Road. During the Yuan dynasty, while travelling in this general area somewhere between 1280 and 1290, Marco Polo saw salt blocks, flat on one side and convex on the other, impressed with the characters for 'Great Khan'. They served both as currency and as commodity.

Local salt was classified as either white or black. According to legend, white salt was found on the ground by white sheep, black salt by black oxen! But, in fact, the difference in colour was the result of different methods of production. At the time of the Tang dynasty, the local people used a fairly primitive method. Water from a brine well (first dug in 749, the eighth year of the Tianbao reign, and still in operation today) was poured over red-hot charcoal formed by burning firewood, whereupon the salt crystallized out. When the charcoal cooled down, the salt crystals formed could be scraped off. Inevitably, the salt obtained like this was pretty black in colour.

It was not until the Qing dynasty (1644-1911) that a new method was adopted: several small earthenware pots containing salt water were placed over a fire and boiled until the water evaporated. The salt made in this way was called 'pot salt' and was much whiter. This method is popular to the present day in Shiyang. The cylindrical salt blocks are



5

convenient for carrying by man or beast and, because of their shape, are also known locally as 'human head salt'.

We visited the local salt factory and went down a well, three metres below ground-level, to watch water being hoisted to the surface. Since the underground water in Shiyang is briny, I asked where local drinking water comes from. The director told me that they used spring water from the mountains.

As the salt trade grew ever more prosperous, cultural exchanges between the southwest and the Central Plains of China multiplied. To mention one good example, there is a Confucius Temple next to the salt

Fresh water is abundant in the mountains (1). The brine well at Shiyang is still productive (2), turning out 'human head salt' (3) (1 and 3 by Tse Shi Fan). Marble bas-relief (4) and bird and beast-shaped dougong brackets (5) in Dacheng Hall at Shiyang's Confucius Temple (2, 4 and 5 by Wang Miao).

4



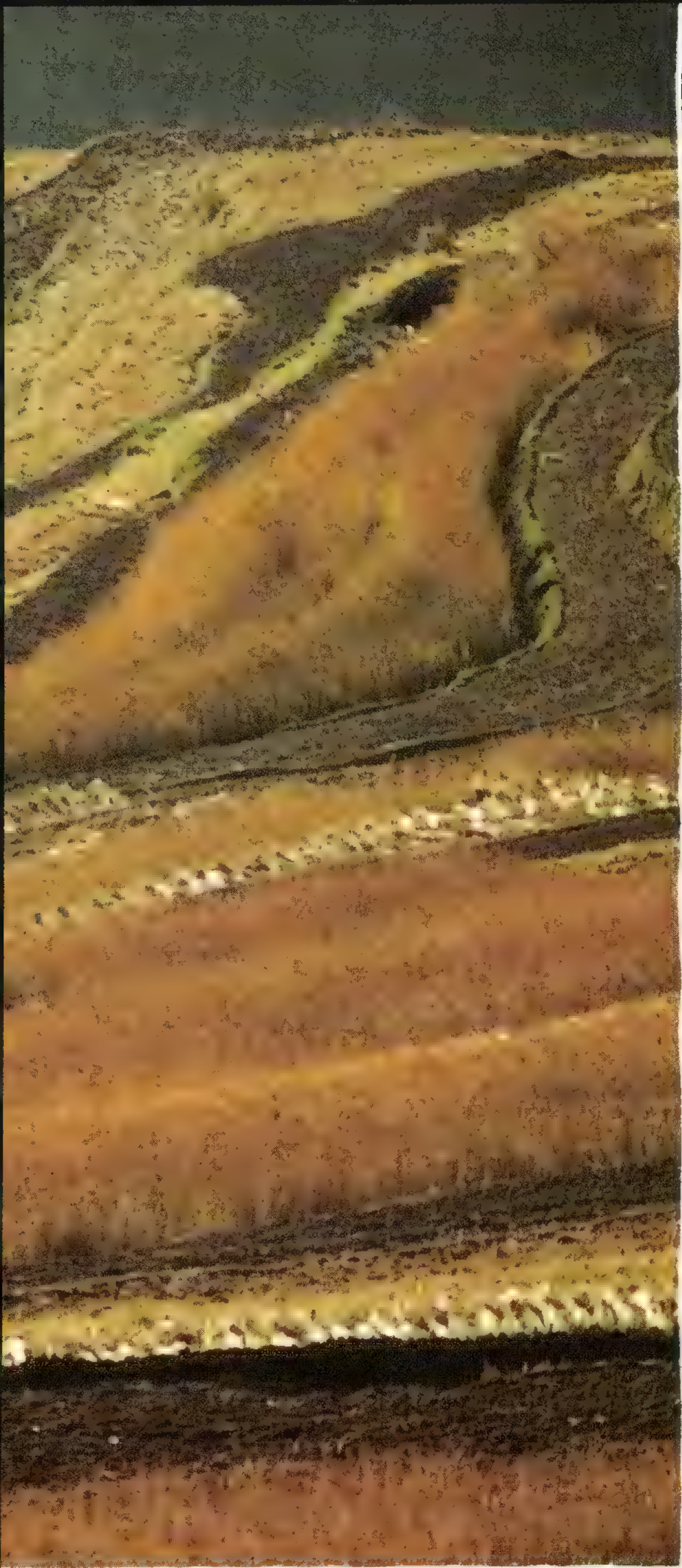
factory. Unfortunately, most of the complex — built in 1609 — has collapsed. Only the Dacheng Hall survives.

On one inner wall there is a relief carving on four slabs of marble, depicting the town's history. The hall also contains a gilt bronze statue of Confucius. Cast in 1708, it is 2.2 metres high and weighs some five hundred kilos. The great sage, who lived around 551–479 B.C., is represented wearing a hat and holding a *hu* (a flat tablet held by officials when received in audience by the emperor). This bronze statue is really unusual; most Confucius Temples contain only a wooden tablet bearing the sage's name.

At Santai, also in Dayao County, a special Yi festival takes place from the twenty-seventh to the twenty-ninth of the third lunar month. Santai is eighty kilometres north of the county town. We drove there to catch one day of the festival.

Great cauldrons containing boiling water into which people were throwing pieces of mutton had been set up along the riverbank. Freshly slaughtered sheep hung from the trees nearby. On the other side of the river, Yi girls wearing beautiful costumes (but usually topped off with a khaki army cap) danced, accompanied by the *yueqin* (a moon-shaped four-stringed lute). After each round of dancing they would disappear into the pine wood where, with the help of their parents, they would quickly change their clothes and emerge to dance again. They were hoping to win the accolade of being the best-dressed, but this was actually just as much a beauty contest for the girls as for their garments!





Xiangyun

Following the ancient Lingguan Route again southwards, we crossed a mountain ridge and came to the plateau on which lies the county town of Yao'an. Known as Longdong formerly, this is a place with a long history.

Still further southwest lies Yunnanyi in Xiangyun County. According to the records, Emperor Wudi of the Western Han liked to study the sky. One day, looking towards the south, he saw colourful clouds. Believing this to be an auspicious sign, he ordered an envoy to follow the clouds. This the envoy did,



4

galloping along the Southwestern Silk Road until he reached a beautiful place which he believed to be their home. The emperor therefore established a county here named Yunnan (literally, 'south of the clouds'), covering the present-day counties of Xiangyun and Midu. The Yunnan Post, as it was called, became an important resting place for travellers along the old road.

But it also became a favoured place for the tombs of the rich. During the 1960s, a two-metre-long bronze coffin was excavated from a rectangular pit. According to archaeological analysis, the coffin was cast between 475 and 465 B.C., in other words, in the Warring States Period (475–211 B.C.). Among the objects enclosed in the coffin was a pair of bronze chopsticks, presumably a sign of Han Chinese influence in the region (or maybe this was the tomb of an early Han Chinese traveller?).

Cultivated strips follow the hillside's contours (1). In the Yao'an area, the Yi people favour loose overvests made from animal hides (2–4) (1, 2 and 3 by Wang Miao, 4 by Tse Shi Fan).



3

Binchuan

From Xiangyun we detoured north to Binchuan County to visit Mount Jizu, east of Lake Erhai. This mountain, which soars to 3,200 metres above sea-level, was a renowned site of pilgrimage. According to the famous Tang-dynasty monk Xuan Zang's *Records of the Western Regions*: 'Kasyapa, on the orders of Buddha, was in charge of compiling the scriptures. He worked for twenty years then went to Mount Jizu to meditate, knowing his end was near.' In its heyday, the mountain boasted 360 monasteries and nunneries and five thousand monks and nuns. Xu Xiake (1586–1641), the great Ming-dynasty traveller and geographer, also went there at the end of his trip to western Yunnan and wrote an essay about it.

Most of the buildings are now in ruins but the largest, Zhusheng Monastery, still stands half-way up the mountain. The funds for building it were originally collected by the Chan Sect monk Xu Yun of the Qing dynasty. Either side of the Mahavira Hall are meditation chambers, monk's cells and so on. Behind stands the Tripitaka Pavilion, the sutra library, which contains a statue of Sakyamuni entering Nirvana — the pose often known as 'Sleeping Buddha' — made of white Burmese jade. This, the monastery's greatest treasure, was reputed to give protection against all evil. Carved by Burmese monks, it was brought to Mount Jizu along the Southwestern Silk Road. It was first enshrined in Yuanjing Nunnery but, when the latter became too dilapidated, it was moved to its present site.



Jianchuan

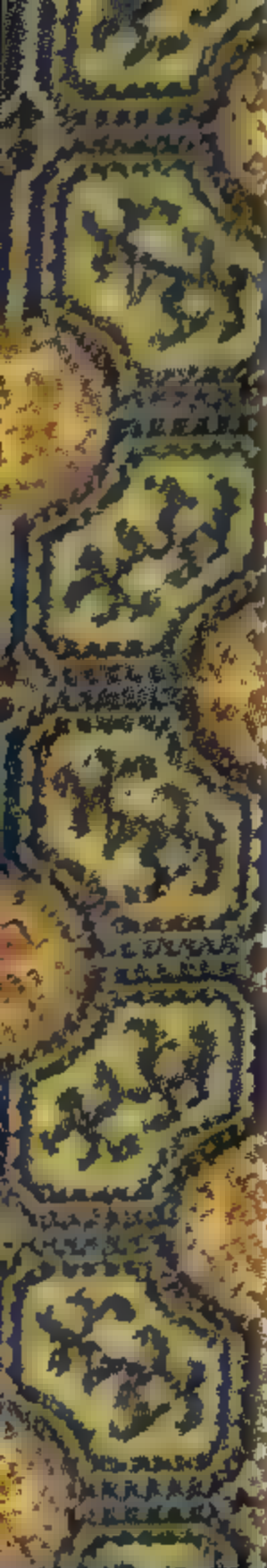
Another mountain visited by Xu Xiake lies west of the county town of Jianchuan. After climbing along a track for two kilometres, we were amazed to see a six-metre-high lokapala — one of the four Buddhist heavenly kings — carved in relief on a rock. Known locally as the 'Stone General', it was executed under the aegis of the Nanzhao and Dali Kingdoms (736–1253), which then ruled all this territory. Xu Xiake said that Bai warriors would always go to pay their respects to the Stone General before going into battle, the intention being to make them invincible.

The lokapala is clad in heavy armour and has a stern expression; he has a trident in his right hand, a pagoda balanced on his left palm. To left and right stand donors, hands clasped in front of their chest. The whole carving is awe-inspiring indeed. The craftsmen who made this masterpiece used the rock's shape and height to full advantage. The lower part of the carving is in high relief, shading into lower relief as you look higher, so that the figure's helmet is delineated only by very shallow incisions. The effect is to make the Stone General appear to be leaning backwards slightly.

We also visited grottoes at Mount Shizhong twenty-five kilometres southwest of Jianchuan. The grottoes are believed to have been dug from the cliff between the late eighth and mid-ninth centuries, but the exact date is unknown. Their religious artefacts include statues of Kasyapa, Tathagata Buddha, the faithful disciple Ananda, Avalokitesvara (Bodhisattva of Mercy), even an elephant with a human body (strangely like the Hindu god Ganesh). There is also a carved image of an

The 'Sleeping Buddha' of white Burmese jade at Mount Jizu's Zhusheng Monastery (1). Pagodas or stupas of this type are a common sight in Jianchuan County (2) (both by Hu Jianguo).





Indian monk only forty-five centimetres high, with a high forehead, snub nose and wide mouth — perhaps a Brahmin. According to historical records, after Indian missionaries came to the area around Lake Erhai to preach Buddhism during the period of the Song dynasty (960–1279), eight kings of the Dali Kingdom renounced their thrones and became monks.

After our visit to Jianchuan County, we returned south via Dali to the village of Huihuideng in the Weishan Yi and Hui Autonomous County. Originally known as Menghua, Weishan has been a place of settlement for the Hui (Chinese Moslems)



since the Yuan dynasty. Huihuideng still has a mosque, the centre of religious activities, which is able to accommodate two thousand worshippers.

From Weishan we went back to Dali for a much-needed rest before heading for Tengchong and the Burmese border along the Yongchang Route.

Translated by Wang Mingjie

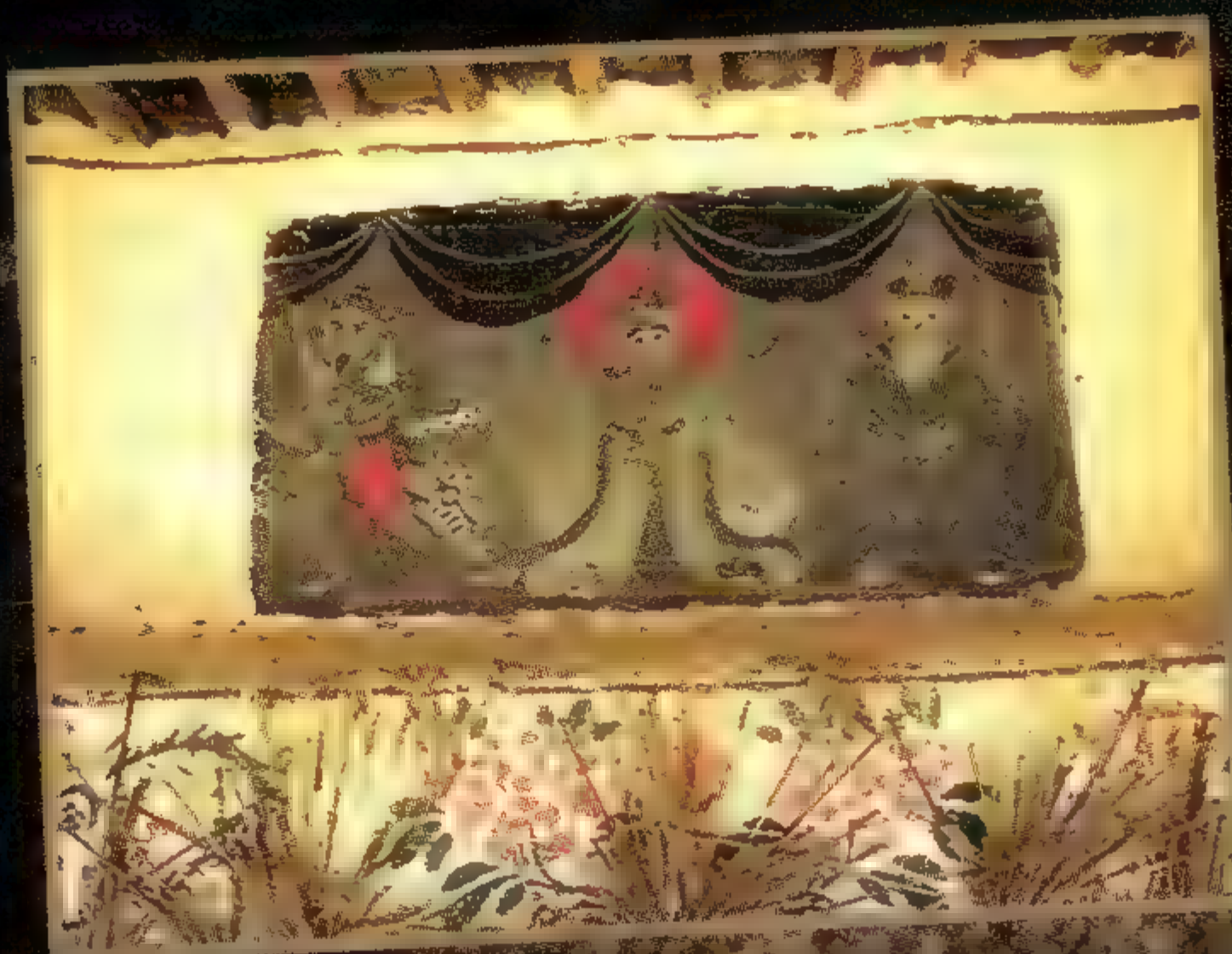
Jianchuan's 'Stone General' (1) and a pillar base thought to depict an Indian monk in the Shizhong Grottoes (2). The mosque at Huihuideng near Weishan (3) (all by Hu Jianguo).



Approach to Burma

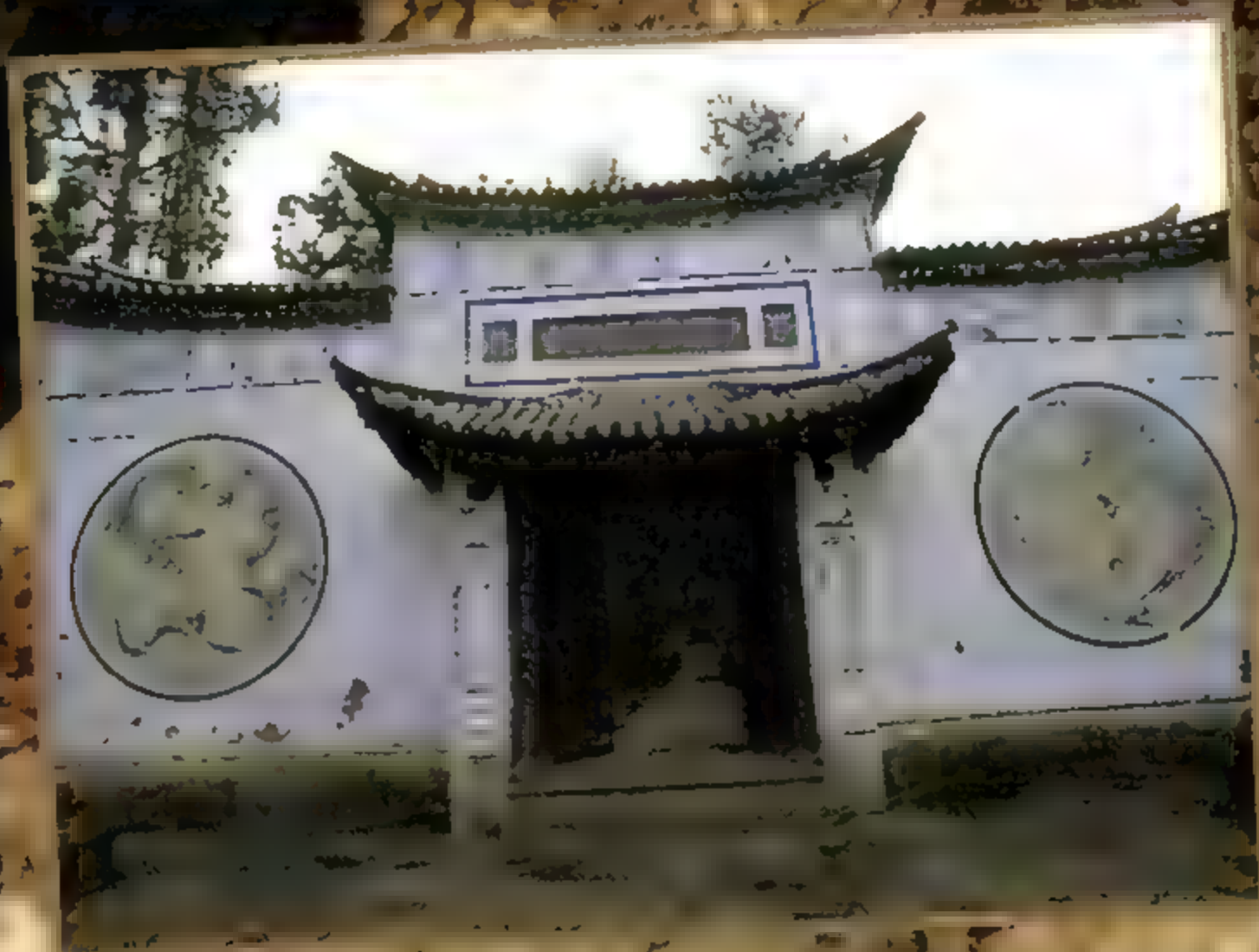
The Yongchang Route

PHOTOS BY WANG MIAO
ARTICLE BY XU YE



The 'Geographical Notes' section in the *New History of the Tang* gives details of a trade route running from Yangjumie (now Dali) through the capital of Yongchang Prefecture (now Baoshan), Zhuge Liang City and Lecheng to the territory of Biao (present-day Burma). The road then continued west over the Black Mountains to the kingdom of Kamarupa in eastern India.

The first part of this route — the southwestern end of China's Southwestern Silk Road — can still be traced today. It is known as the Yongchang Route, from the ancient prefectural name of Baoshan.



As a caravan sets off into the mountains during the trading season (6), reminders of sights along the route include sisal-hemp being processed near Baoshan (1), a shrine on Mount Bonan (2, by Wu Jialin), the Achang swordsmiths of Husa (3, by Xu Jinyan), the Martyrs' Cemetery in Tengchong (4), and Buddhist nuns at Ruili (5).

Through the Bonan Mountains



In the year 120 in the Eastern Han dynasty (25–220), around one thousand musicians and acrobats from the Eastern Roman Empire reportedly arrived at Luoyang, then the imperial capital, in present-day Henan Province. Intended as tribute from the King of Burma to Emperor Andi, they gave performances involving juggling, fire-eating and self-mutilation that created quite a sensation. It is thought most probable that they journeyed to the Han capital via the Southwestern Silk Road.

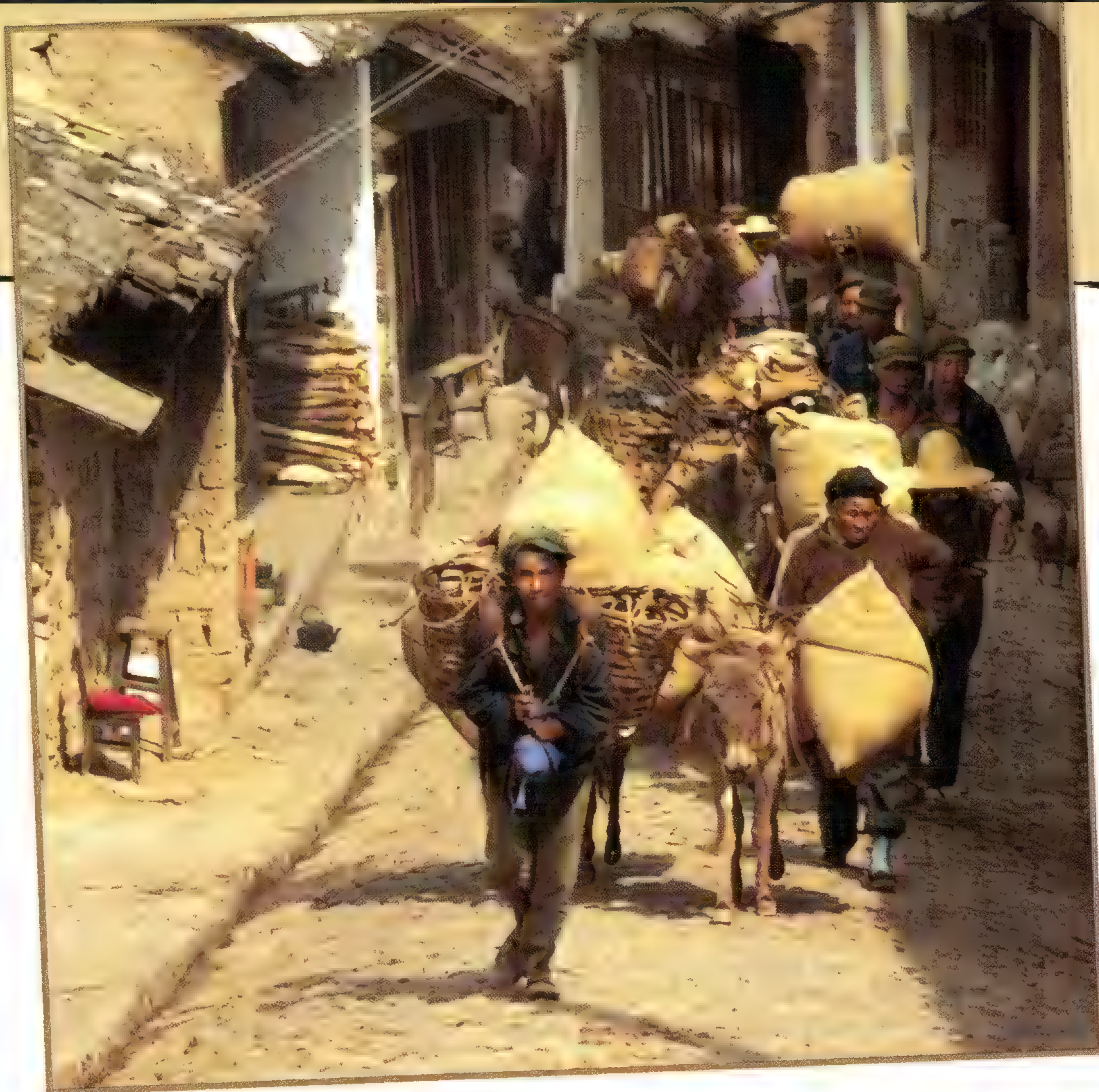
In our articles last month we saw how two almost parallel 'arms' of the Southwestern Silk Road ran south and west from Chengdu, capital of Shu, through Sichuan and into Yunnan, meeting at Dali. The third and last section in China — as stated in the *New History of the Tang* —

went from Dali via Baoshan to Tengchong and the Burmese border. Later a branch road appeared, dipping further southwest from Baoshan to cross the border via a number of small townships in the present-day Dehong Dai and Jingpo Autonomous Prefecture.

Shortly after leaving Dali, having passed through Yangbi County, the Yongchang Route runs into the area of the Bonan Mountains; Bonan having been the name of a county in the first century which had its seat at present-day Yongping. There are not many historic sites in the township of Shayang in Yongping County. In fact, there is only one: the ruin of a building which spans the street. History records that Shayang was the last stop for merchants and travellers before they crossed the Bonan Mountains, and this ruin was the customs post.



1



2

Celebrating the end of Ramadan in Qudong's mosque (1). The old road lives on in such scenes: traders in the streets of Yangbi (2, by Tse Shi Fan) and the ruined customs post at Shayang (3, by Wu Jialin).



3

Next stop nowadays is the Qudong Hui Autonomous Township. In the township's mosque, crowds of local men were assembled, many dressed in green with a white cap. The day, May 7, turned out to be the festival to mark the end of the month-long fast of Ramadan, the Id al-Fitr or Bairam. The Hui here are mostly descended from Moslem cavalymen who served under Nasulading (son of Saidianchi Zhansiding, a governor of Yunnan), who launched campaigns against Burma in the Yuan dynasty (1271-1368). Many of them became merchants.

The Yongchang Route, its surface paved with stone, continues to Mount Bonan which it traverses in zigzags. At intervals, there is a widened terrace where the horses and mules could stop and rest. This





2

The flagstoned path across Mount Bonan (1, by Xu Jinyan) leads through the 'pass' formed by the remains of Jiangding Monastery (2, by Wu Jialin). Today one has to take a bamboo ferry across the Lancang (4), but this was how Jihong Bridge looked a few years ago (3) (3 and 4 by Tse Shi Fan).



3



4

mountain track was made by a large number of labourers pressed into service by Emperor Wudi around 105 B.C. To this day, imprints of horseshoes on the stone slabs of the road's surface testify to the volume of horse traffic which has passed this way. In the year 69, Emperor Mingdi sent more labourers to widen this stretch of road. The conscripts composed a song which became known as *Leading to Bonan*:

*Great are the deeds of the Han court!
Here to open up a land
That has not shown its allegiance
in the long past.
To climb over the high hill of Bonan,
We knock and knock rocks, ding and dang,
day and night.
Defying death to cross the Lanjin Ferry
We fly over the River Lancang.
What do we get for all this suffering?
We suffer so that somebody else can
sing for joy.*

Mount Bonan rises to between 2,500 and 2,800 metres above sea-level. To the east lies the Yongping Plain, to the west the River Lancang. Atop the mountain ridge stand the remains of Jiangding Monastery. We continued downhill and came, in about an hour, to the ancient Lanjin Ferry on the Lancang, where two bridge piers stood marooned. We learned that these were all that was left of a famous suspension bridge — Jihong (Rainbow) Bridge — built in the Ming dynasty in 1475; it was composed of eighteen iron cables, and was the oldest bridge of its kind so far known in China. In 1986, buffeted by unusually fierce floods, the bridge collapsed. Since then bamboo rafts have made their reappearance as the local means of crossing the river.

Baoshan: The Route Forks



Once across the Lancang, we followed the old road, paved with flagstones hidden among tall grasses, to Mount Luomin, then continued to Pingpo. This mountain village was once an important staging post on the Yongchang Route. Unlike villages elsewhere which have only one or two family names, three at most, it boasts a variety of family names among its inhabitants since the villagers are descended from merchants and drovers from all parts of China. However, once the Burma Road was opened up to vehicular traffic in the 1940s, Pingpo lost its importance.

The following stage took us to the village of Shuizhai, from where we took the modern but crudely finished road to Baoshan. We passed small factories processing sisal-hemp (*Agave rigida*). This plant,

common in the south of China, has thick, fleshy leaves shaped almost like swords, and is utilized to the full in the Baoshan area for manufacturing rope and paper. Baoshan was also an early producer of cotton-like cloth — even before the third century — which, like Sichuan silk, was a major commodity on the trade routes of southwestern China. This cloth was woven from kapok, the softened fibres of the kapok tree, and was known as 'white sheet' or *bodie* (roughly approximating the Sanskrit word for cotton) for seven or eight centuries before the equivalent Chinese word — *mian* — was invented in the Southern Song dynasty (1127–1279).

Baoshan today is an attractive town with a neat layout. Two main



A mural in Baoshan's Yuhuang Pavilion depicts the Jade Emperor (1); a Han-dynasty pottery figurine unearthed in the vicinity (3) (both by Tse Shi Fan). Adobe buildings are a common sight along the old road (2, by Wu Jialin).



roads intersect at its heart, dividing it into four quarters. Green, wooded Mount Taibao sits in the western part. On a slope near the city stands the Yuhuang (Jade Emperor) Pavilion, built in the sixteenth century during the Ming dynasty, the oldest piece of architecture extant in Baoshan. It now houses the offices of the Cultural Relics Bureau.

Every three days there is a fair in the district. Minority people living in the mountains, just like their forefathers, travel all the way to Baoshan to sell their produce in the city, which is mainly populated by Han Chinese. In fact, since antiquity, Baoshan has been an important commercial centre. From the third century onwards, domestic and foreign merchants gathered here to exchange gold, precious stones, peacocks,

rhinoceros, elephants, silk, and much more. Quite a few Indian merchants chose to settle permanently in Baoshan for the sake of business.

Continuing west from Baoshan, the Yongchang Route climbed over the Gaoligong Mountains and, at Zhuge Liang City (presumably a fortress or garrison), branched into two, one fork leading via Tengchong to Myitkyina in Burma, the other further south via Luxi (Mangshi) and Wanding to the Burmese Lashio. The historical records show that the road through Tengchong was the main one; however, it gradually declined in importance, especially following the opening of the Burma Road through Luxi and Wanding some fifty years ago.

Dehong's Capital



For the sake of convenience, we decided to take the Burma Road. After Baoshan we first had to cross a murky, turbulent river — the Nujiang (Angry River) — so named because it always seems to be roaring along in a thunderous rage.

As we approached the river, the temperature rose constantly. By the time we reached the riverside, the wind had dropped and it was stiflingly hot in the gorge. Tropical plants grew in profusion beside the Nujiang and paddy fields stretched everywhere. We crossed the Hongqi (Red Flag) Bridge and started to negotiate the slope ahead. As we climbed, so the temperature dropped and the road grew increasingly difficult. We were now in the Hengduan Range, where each mountain ridge alternates with a river flowing through a deep trench from north to south. It is difficult to imagine how travellers in the olden days managed to overcome such terrain; just travelling along the modern highway is excitement enough!

Descending the opposite side of the ridge, we saw knots of Dai women wearing long black sarongs coming towards us. We were approaching Luxi, capital of the Dehong Dai and Jingpo Autonomous

Prefecture. The Dai people here are often called the 'Land' Dai, to distinguish them from their cousins the 'Water' Dai of Xishuangbanna, and are said to be rather more sinicized. For example, the women here wear a black scarf tied like a turban on the head, whereas the Dai of Xishuangbanna twist their hair simply in a bun. Unmarried Dai girls of Luxi do not favour sarongs; they prefer dark trousers tied with an embroidered cotton sash.

Luxi presents a picture typical of a southern city, with streets lined with trees and sumptuous flowers. We went to the market early. Vivacious Dai women from outside the city were sitting by the roadside extolling the wares — vegetables and fruit — they had brought in on shoulder-poles. But we also saw much shyer people of the Dêrnang tribe, laden with a bamboo basket supported by a forehead strap, waiting patiently for customers in the back lanes. Some elderly women were squatting under a shed, gossiping, chewing betel nut. They all had their teeth encased in gold foil, a custom witnessed by Marco Polo in 1287, when the Venetian was visiting Yunnan on behalf of the Yuan-dynasty founder, Kublai Khan. Marco Polo reported: 'The people



2



3



4

The graceful Dai women of the Dehong area wear a black sarong or trousers, a short blouse and various types of headgear (1, by Li Yaobo, 3 and 4). An intricate religious mural seen in a Luxi temple (2).

here are idolators and subject to the Great Khan. They have all their teeth of gold — that is to say, every tooth is covered with gold. They make a cast in gold of the shape of their teeth, and with this they cover both their lower and their upper teeth.' However, in his time, it was only the men that did this, not the women.

Under the azure sky with white clouds, we walked among graceful bamboos and giant trees to visit the biggest temple, known here as a 'Mian' or Burmese temple, situated only about three hundred metres from the Mangshi Guesthouse in Luxi. Almost all Dai are Buddhists, which is why there are so many temples, big and small, all over the city. There are also quite a number of stupas, the most unusual being those erected actually within the hollowed-out trunk of a tree. One such stupa in the grounds of Mangshi No. 1 Primary School was built under the supervision of a Dai devotee some two centuries ago.

Luxi is a place where many different minorities live together, but nevertheless keep their own traditions very much alive. Not far from Luxi, four giant multi-coloured pillars rise on an altar-like terrace. Two crossed sabres are mounted between them. This is a totem of the

Jingpo; the patterns on the columns stand for the Himalayan Mountains, said to be the cradle of this people.

Every year, for a few days around the middle of the first lunar month, the Jingpo perform their *munao* dance in front of the monument. The scene is one of great excitement. The leading dancer is an elderly man and he wears a headdress adorned with feathers including a peacock feather, said to be a reminder of the origins of the dance. Legend has it that, in ages past, the Sun God invited all the birds to take part in a *munao* dance in heaven. On their return, they chose the peacock to lead the first *munao* dance on earth. They performed under an orange tree, which grew luxuriantly under their eyes. The young Ningguanwa, the ancestor of the Jingpo, happened to witness the scene. Having learnt by heart the dance steps passed on to the birds by the Sun God, he returned to his home in the foothills of the Himalaya where, marking out a circle for the dance, he imitated the steps of the peacock. The Jingpo thus were able to hold their own *munao* dance, which brought them a good harvest.

Santaishan some twenty kilometres south of Luxi is a Dênang



LALUNG
KHONG MU

BO ZO

ZHAN
UPZHA



2



Around Luxi's Jingpo totem (1), not far from the Zhou Enlai Memorial Pavilion (2), the Jingpo perform their munao dance (4) (1 and 4 by Tse Shi Fan). A lot of work goes into the colourful costumes of the Dêrnang (3).

3



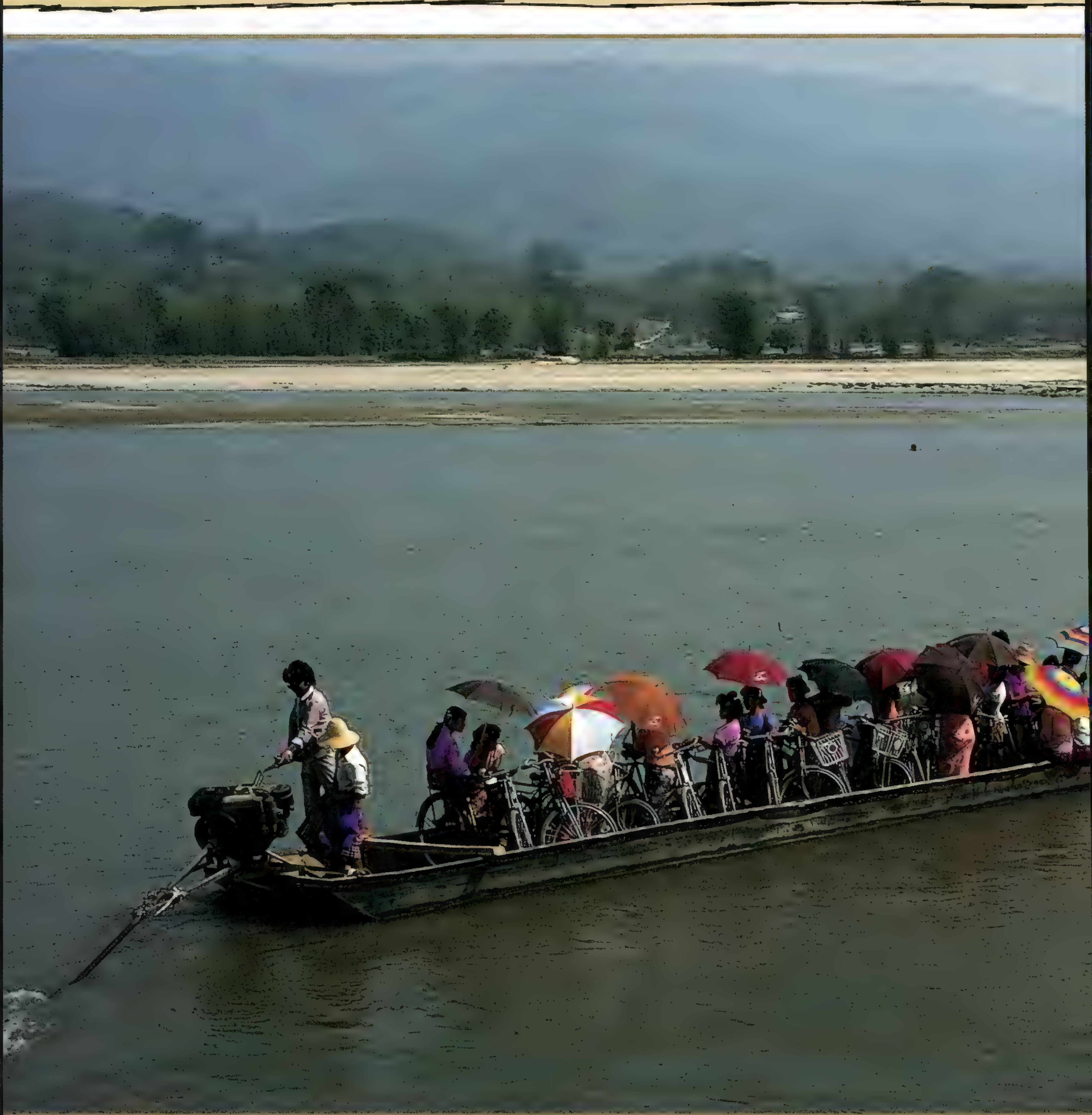
4

autonomous township. This tribe call themselves by this name, meaning 'mountain crag', in memory of their troglodyte forebears. Now, of course, they live in bamboo houses with a thatched roof. The Dêrnang used to be officially called the Benglong and sub-divided into Red, Black or 'Flowery' Benglong depending on their women's type of dress. Thus, the women of Santaishan who wear black garb decorated with red and yellow woollen balls are apparently 'Red', while their neighbours in the village of Chudonggua, who wear blue, are 'Flowery'! The name Benglong was dropped in 1985.

The Dêrnang like the Va and the Bulang, all members of the Mon-Khmer linguistic family, are descendants of the Pu people who were entrenched in southwestern Yunan between the first and fifth centuries and founded the Kingdom of Ailao. Taking advantage of the

favourable climatic conditions, they grew rice in the fertile soil, used the mulberry trees to raise silkworms, and grew cotton to weave cloth. As they were the first to exploit these lands, many placenames and things still bear their mark. The River Yuanjiang was known in ancient times as Pushui (Pu Waters); a type of bamboo in Baoshan is known as Pu bamboo; and the Dai have the saying: 'If heaven was created by God, the earth was opened up by the La' (the latter being the Dai name for the Pu).

Land Ports on the Sino-Burmese Border





Across the River Ruili lies Burma (1). There is much cross-border traffic as local residents, here from Wanding, can cross without too many formalities (2).

From Santaishan the highway continues southwestward across Wanding Bridge over the River Mangshi and into Burmese territory, where we cannot follow it. Wanding is now one of several 'land ports' on the Sino-Burmese border in the Dehong Autonomous Prefecture. The reinforced concrete bridge is out of bounds to tourists, but open to people with special passes living on either side in the strip of territory classified as the frontier region.

The history of Wanding as a centre for Sino-Burmese trade can be traced back to Han times. It is said that the bridge in those days was no more than two logs side by side — a little carelessness and one would slip into the river! As I wandered through Wanding's streets, I noted all sorts of buildings housing restaurants, hotels, trading agencies, post and telecommunications offices.... But, in fact, since the road's course has changed in recent years so that vehicles running between Luxi and Ruili now bypass Wanding, this crossing has become much quieter.

Nongdao near Ruili, about twenty-seven kilometres from Wanding, is another land port. Ruili means 'foggy city' in the Dai language. Separated from Burma only by the River Ruili (a tributary of the Irrawaddy), it has been a place for the peoples of the frontier region to exchange goods since earliest times. Today there are stalls there selling fruit and food with a Burmese flavour and the shop signboards are in Chinese, Dai and Burmese. Merchants from Burma, Thailand and Pakistan discuss deals and haggle in a confusion of languages — a scene which has probably changed little in its essentials over centuries.

The distance from bank to bank is not great. Residents may cross the river, in other words, the border, by taking a motor barge costing only some fifty fen. The day we were there, the water level was low, and a bamboo bridge had been rigged part-way across for convenience. The sandy beach at the crossing was bustling with activity. Daily necessities such as thermos flasks, electrical appliances, batteries, etc., were piled up ready for transport to Burma. These small motor barges, very ordinary really, can take a load of up to one thousand kilos.

Longchuan's Achang





2



4



3

The Yunyan Stupa at Yingjiang was built by Burmese craftsmen (1, by Wu Jialin). A Han Chinese tomb (2, by Xu Jinyan) at Husa, home of the Achang, some of whose women wear a 'banana-leaf' headdress (5). The Land Dai of Dehong (3) dress rather differently than the Water Dai of Xishuangbanna (4).



5

We deliberately headed back north to see something of the original main course of the Yongchang Route. In order to avoid backtracking, we travelled to Longchuan, then on to Tengchong via Yingjiang County.

The Husa district of Longchuan County is inhabited by a branch of the Achang. Interestingly, it is also the site of a Qing-dynasty Han Chinese tomb from the late nineteenth century. The Achang of Husa are said to be descended from Achang women who married Han Chinese soldiers serving in the Ming army who were left behind to farm and garrison this area after three successful campaigns against the rebellious clan of Si in 1448. This military background is also said to be the reason for their great skill in making knives, daggers and swords. They differ from Achang people elsewhere in their customs and religious beliefs. For instance, quite a few Achang homes in Husa contain a memorial tablet of the Confucian type bearing the words *tian* (heaven), *di* (earth), *jun* (sovereign), *qin* (parents) and *shi* (teacher), evidence of

Han Chinese cultural influence. Also, the men usually dress in the Han Chinese manner, wearing their national dress only at festivals.

The county town of Yingjiang is set on a plateau near the bank of the river of the same name. This is an important jade trading centre. Burmese jade dealers often visit the town, bringing raw jade to negotiate with Chinese jade carvers. Shops there display piles of raw jade, each rough-looking pebble cut at one edge to reveal the jade inside.

About two kilometres southeast of Yingjiang, at Mangmengding Stockade, stands the Yunyan (or Mengding) Stupa built in 1949 by Burmese artisans under the patronage of the last hereditary headman of Yingjiang. This edifice incorporating all the features of Burmese stupas is made of cement. A large stupa and forty smaller ones stand on a square base. All the stupas are fitted with bronze bells whose chimes ring pleasantly to the ear as they sway in the breeze. Every April, during the Dai Water-Splashing Festival, Buddhists come here to pay homage.

Tengchong, Journey's End





1



2

Air-dried beef makes a popular snack (1) in Tengchong, where the numerous hot springs facilitate medical treatment as warmed bamboo cups are set over acupuncture points (2) (both by Wu Jialin). Yellow rape flowers flourish in the basin (3, by Tse Shi Fan).



3

We were finally back on the main Yongchang Route. The terminus of the Southwestern Silk Road within China, Tengchong, is situated in a basin at the western foot of the Gaoligong Mountains. More than one thousand copper five-zhu coins minted during the reign of the Han-dynasty Emperor Wudi (141-87 B.C.) have been unearthed in a walnut orchard at the foot of Mount Baofeng, which towers above the town. What stories must lie behind this treasure trove!

As we travelled along the three-kilometre-long road through Tengchong, we saw many minority people selling agricultural produce and sundry snacks. In the past, the variety of goods funnelled through the town to and from Southeast Asia was very much wider than it is now. They included cotton, raw jade, copper, silk fabric, semi-precious stones such as lapis lazuli, pearls.... By the seventeenth century, there were even some 'international trading companies' such as Fuchunheng, which exported native and special products from western Yunnan to

Burma and imported Burmese cotton in return. This firm also had branches in Burma dealing with raw silk.

In the Western Han, Tengchong was known as Dianyue or 'Riding Elephant Kingdom' and has since antiquity maintained extensive contacts with the outside world. It was one of the places opened to foreign merchants in the Qing dynasty; it even had a British consulate at one time! However, it only received its present name in 1913. Apart from anything else, it is known for its geothermal zone, the result of extensive volcanic activity; there are some eighty hot or boiling springs in the vicinity, as well as twenty or so craters. Further afield, at Mazhan, there are more than one hundred volcanic cones to be seen.

Still following the line of the original Yongchang Route towards Burma, we headed northwest to Guyong, home of the Lisu. Here in the Tengchong area, Lisu women dress differently than those in the Nujiang Lisu Autonomous County further north in Yunnan. They do not wear the

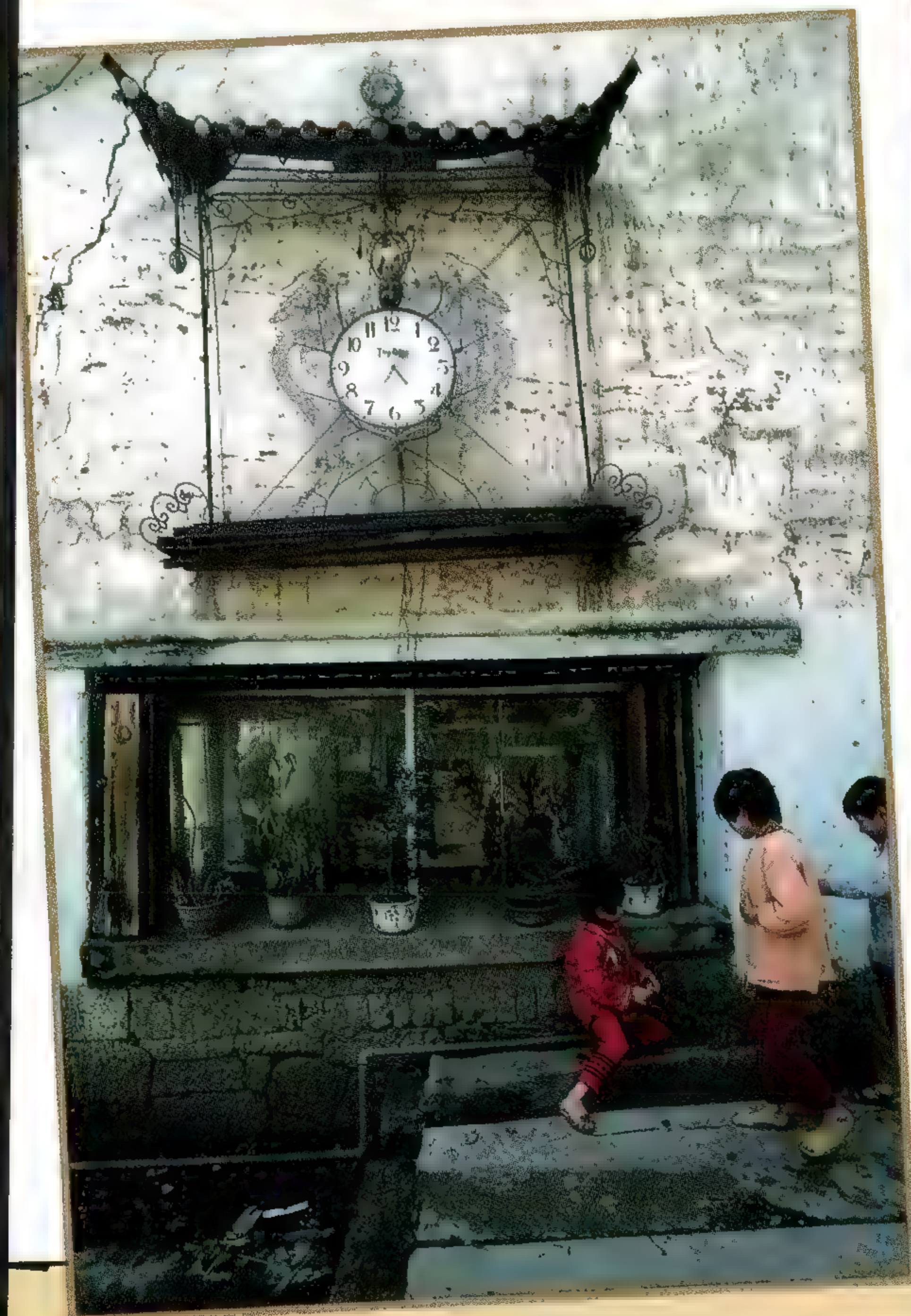




2



4



3

Mules and horses ford a fast-flowing stream in the Gaoligong Mountains (1, by Tse Shi Fan). The Martyrs' Cemetery (2, by Wu Jialin) in Tengchong, where igneous rock is fashioned into pig feeders and sundry other items (4). A Lisu woman at Houqiao on the Sino-Burmese border (5) in this region where cultural exchanges are evident in details such as this clock (3).



5

hat and bands trimmed with coral beads and shells of the latter; instead their jacket and skirt are decorated with colourful cotton appliques in red, yellow and blue. Their heavy necklaces are imported from across the border.

The nearest township to Burma is Houqiao (Monkey Bridge) in Guyong. The border here is represented by the River Binglang, formed by the Guyong, Sancha and Heinitang. In the past there was only a single-log bridge spanning the river and it was the fact that one had to clamber along like it like a monkey (*hou*), which gave the place its name! Today there is an iron bridge and a frontier post, and the crossing is safe, but also of course much more time-consuming owing to the formalities involved.

Desheng (Victory) Fort which still stands in thick vegetation by the river is a stone structure six metres high. We stood on top of the fort to look out at the continuation of the Silkwestern Silk Road as it was swallowed up by the jungle on the Burmese side.

Having thus achieved our purpose, we returned to Tengchong and continued east through the one pass across the Gaoligong Mountains which governs all entrances and exits to and from the town's basin. Beyond, at the River Nujiang, the land slopes gently to the Lujiang Plain; the fields east of the river are called Daojie, those to the west Bawan. The Lujiang Plain has a subtropical climate; it produces cash crops such as sugar cane, rubber, coffee and pepper. In the past, this area was anything but healthy, according to a popular rhyme:

The sun is like a scorching fire;

The saplings droop low.

People in a state of coma die of fever;

Dead fish on the surface of the water float.

It used to be said that any Han Chinese forced to come here for some reason would first put his affairs in order, instruct his wife to re-marry, and generally prepare himself for death!

Translated by Ren Jiazhen



Why does this Dai family of Mangshi, Yunnan Province, keep its resplendent TV and stereo player cabinet out on the front porch? One prefers to think that it is not out of necessity (too big, too high?) but out of goodwill. Its members wish to share their enjoyment at watching TV and listening to music with their fellow villagers.

(Photo by Wang Miao)

SOUTHWESTERN SILK ROAD (II)

Scenes Along an A

Retracing the line of the Southwestern Silk Road nowadays, you often witness interesting local practices in cities, towns and villages. Many a fascinating sight, many an example of human ingenuity, diverts the weary traveller....



Yanjin County in Yunnan is split by the River Guanhe. The banks are steep and the river is turbulent, and the traditional way to cross is to take the cableway. Fair enough if you are unburdened, but — with a bike? However, the local people are totally inured to this means of travel; to them, it is nothing out of the ordinary. His nonchalance is clearly no pose.

(Photo by Wu Jialin)



Each carrying a heavy table, these women are still managing to proceed at a pretty brisk pace. A closer look reveals that most of the table's weight is borne by their head and neck. Dali in Yunnan is famous for its marble deposits, and products made of marble — like these tables — are great favourites with tourists. This is one manufacturer's way of getting a new consignment to market quickly!

(Photo by Wang Miao)

ncient Road

TEXT BY CHENG CHENG



Where there's a will, there's a way.... The bedstead is much longer and wider than the bicycle, but then this task would have deterred any but the most determined and self-confident anyway. The cyclist obviously has a superb sense of balance. All those he passes in Qingshen County, Sichuan Province, gaze in wonder at this epitome of mind over matter.

(Photo by Wu Jialin)

Translated by Anne Yan

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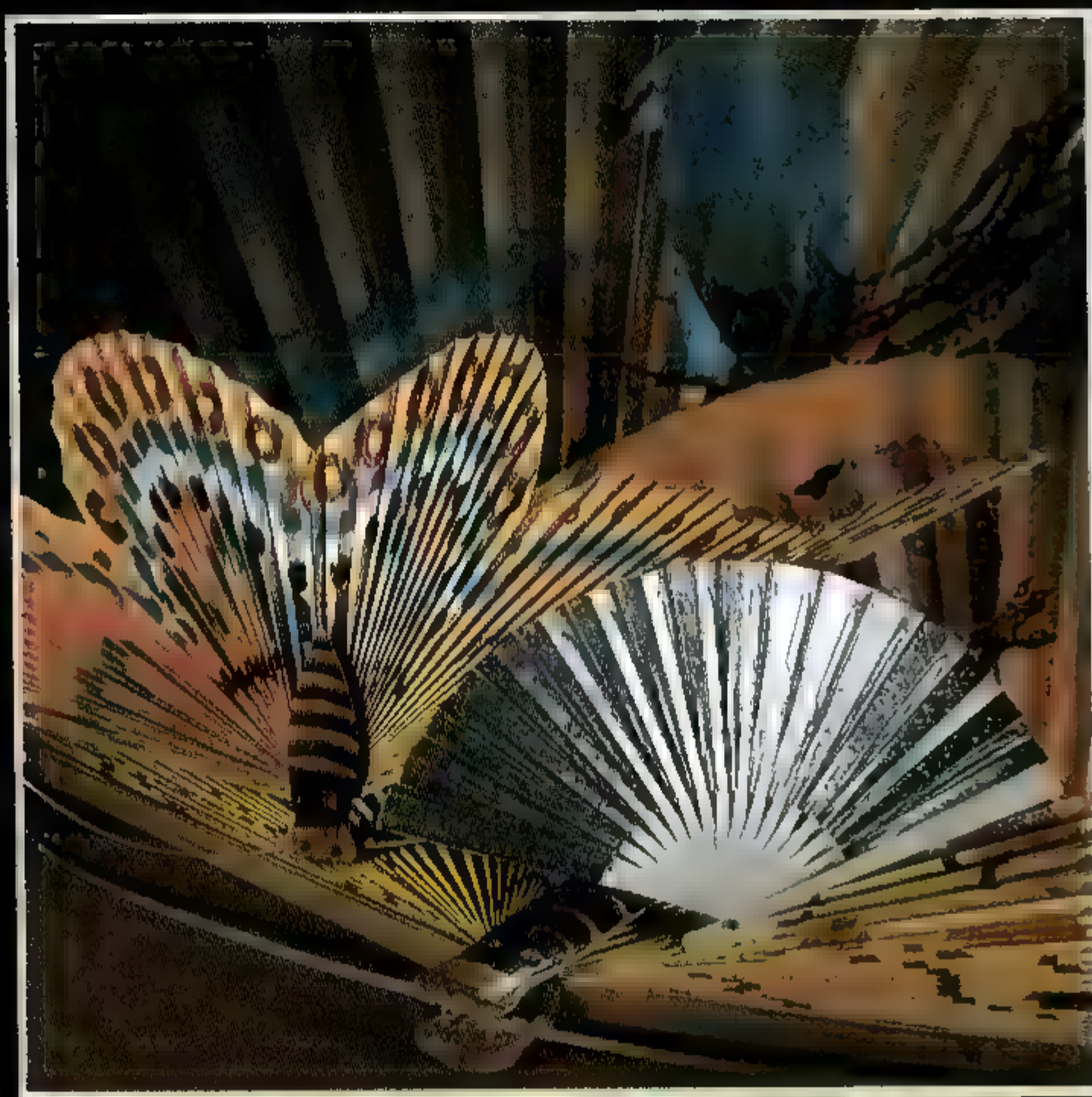
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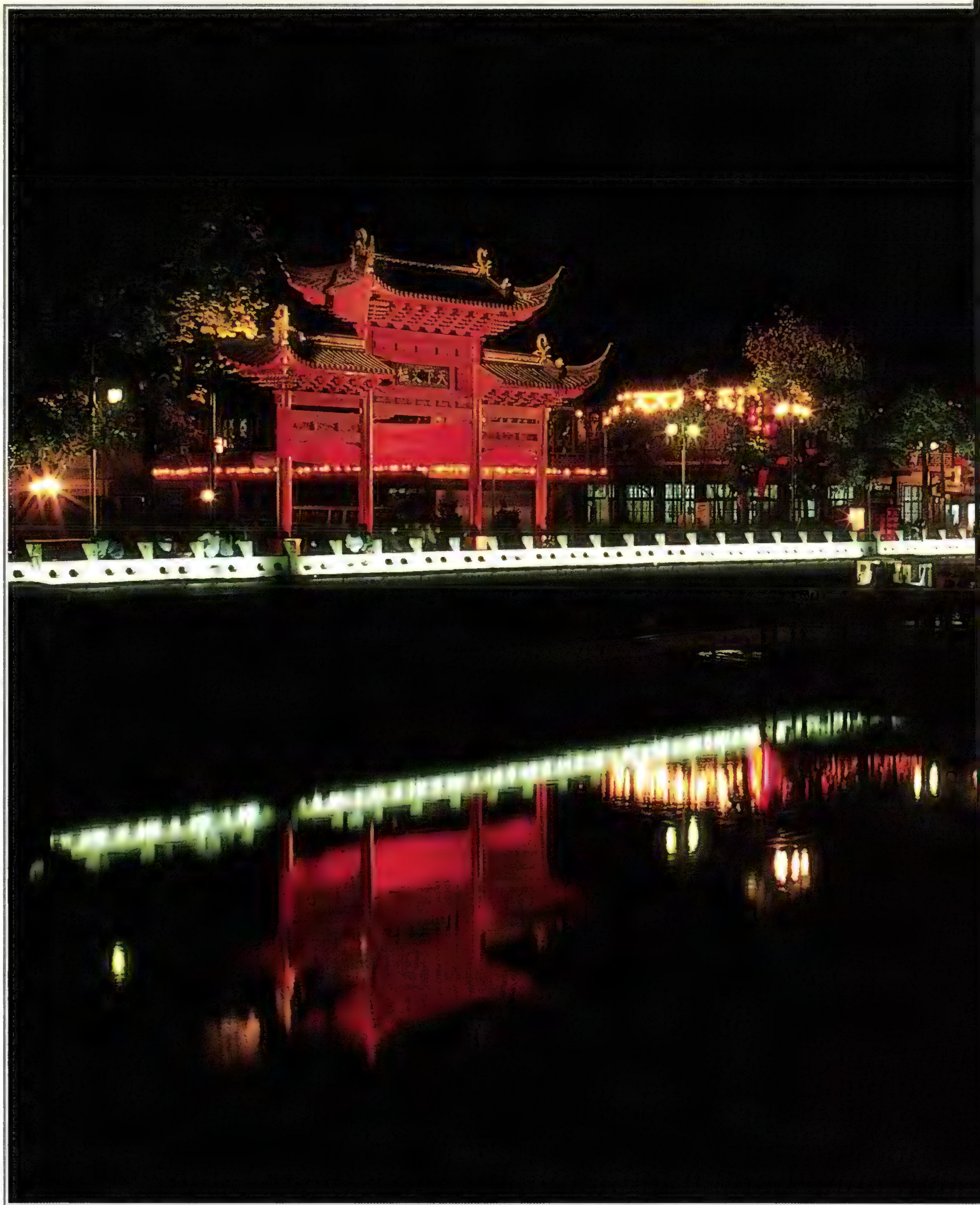
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Oars Creak Again on a Rejuvenated



Once again the Qinhua riverside blazes with lights in the evening

nated River

PHOTOS BY TAI CHI YIN
ARTICLE BY YU QIAN



1

Five years had zipped by since my last visit to Nanjing, capital of Jiangsu Province. Then, the waters of the River Qinhuai were murky and stagnant from the thick layer of sludge deposited on its bottom. This 110-kilometre-long tributary of the Yangtse originates southeast of Nanjing and runs west through the city district before merging with the Yangtse.

Now, paying a return visit to Nanjing, I found that the river had been dredged and boating, suspended for many decades, had been resumed. New buildings in typical Jiangnan ('south of the Yangtse') style had gone up on both sides of the river and the nearby Confucius Temple had also been renovated. The river is again proving a draw.

Many romances have taken place here, their often sad ending imbuing the river with a delicate, plaintive atmosphere in the minds of many Chinese.

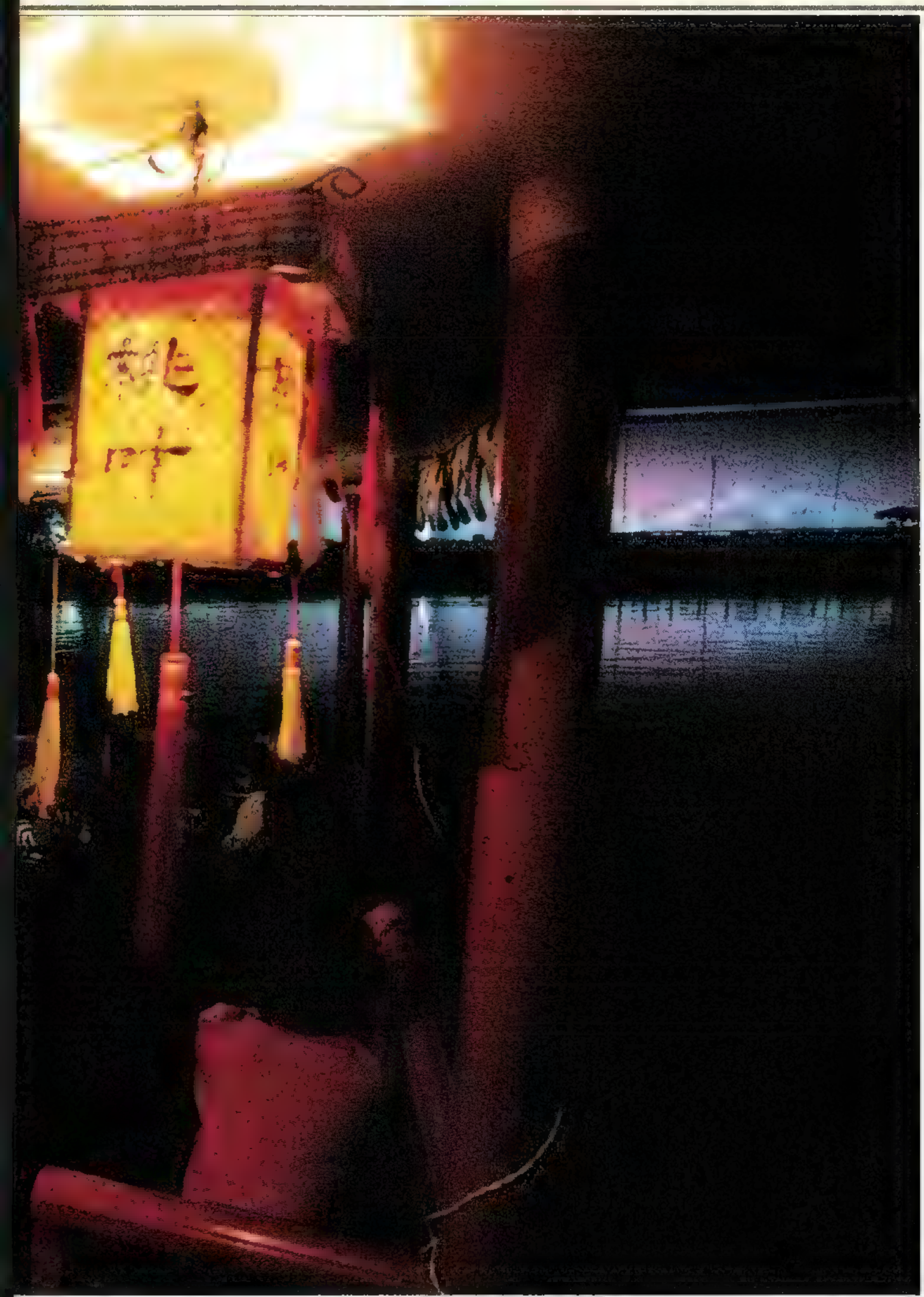
In ancient days the river was known as the Canglongpu (River Mouth Hiding a Dragon), later as the Huaishui. Legend has it that Emperor Shihuang of the Qin dynasty (221-207 B.C.) had Fangshan Hill tunnelled through and the Huaishui diverted to link up with the Yangtse; it was thus renamed the Qinhuai.

At the time of the Six Dynasties (220-589) during which Nanjing, then called Jiankang, was the capital of the Kingdom of Wu (222-280) and of the Eastern Jin (317-420), markets and fairs spread along both banks of the river. Every day upwards of a thousand small boats are said to have plied its waters and moored alongside its banks at night.

The day of my arrival in Nanjing, I strolled south along Zhongshan Road South, crossed the planetree-lined Zhonghua Avenue and soon came to the Confucius Temple. Built in the Song dynasty in 1034, with the Dacheng (Great Accomplishment) Hall at its centre and a symmetrical wing to left and right, the complex covers an area of 26,300 square metres. The Lantern Festival is held here every year from the first to the eighteenth day of the first lunar month (usually in February), with performances such as lion-dancing and stilt-walking.

The main entrance of the temple faces the river across a large square; at one side of the square is the Kuixing (Star of Literary Genius) Pavilion, which nowadays contains a teahouse. As dusk was falling I found myself a table by the window overlooking the river and settled in to wait until it was





2



3



4

completely dark, sipping tea in a leisurely fashion while enjoying the view.

I noticed a number of archaic-looking 'seven-plank' boats moored alongside the nearby landing stage, pleasure boats painted red in the manner of days gone by. Their cabins are appointed with Ming-style furnishings. There is a large lantern at the prow and another at the stern bearing the name of the boat, in most cases an evocative one with some historical or legendary local association: Qinhuai, Wuyi (Black Garment), Taoye (Peach-Tree Leaf), Qinxin (Lute Heart), Wanqing (Fine Evening), etc.

Cool as Nanjing can be on an autumn evening, my tea soon grew cold. Glancing down again at the river bank, I saw that there were now fewer people waiting in line for a boat than a moment before and decided that it was time for me too to go boating. This place where the boats leave from is known as Panchi Pond. It was made in 1029 in the Song dynasty by expanding the inner loop of the Qinhuai.

The river water was like a mirror reflecting the dimly-lit lanterns. When all the seats were occupied, the oarswoman — dressed as her counterpart of centuries ago would have been — pulled gently out into the river. Our boat glided smoothly west towards the first of the bridges, Wende Bridge, so slowly that pedestrians on the bank easily outpaced us.

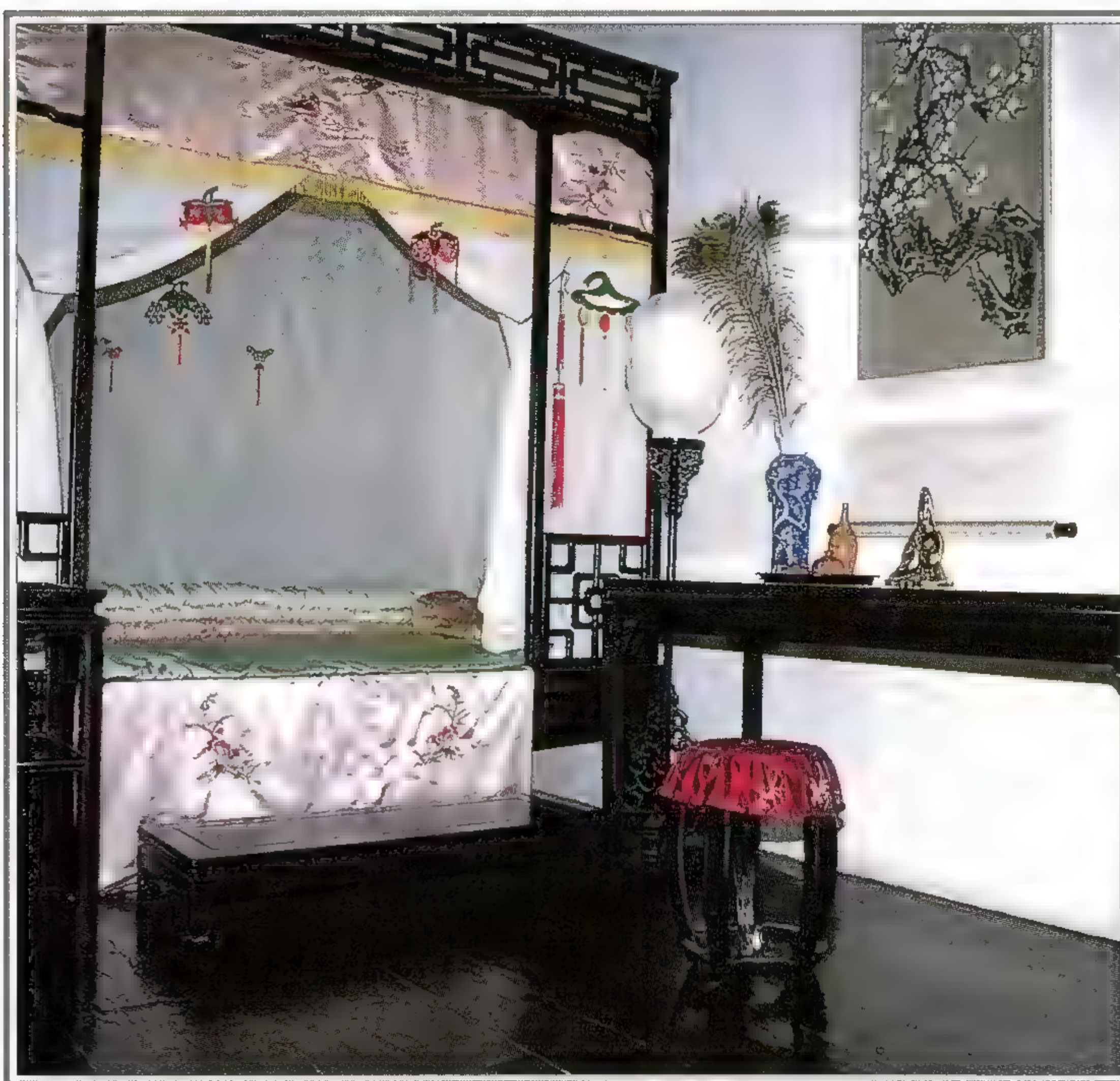
Built in 1585, Wende Bridge has an unusual moon-gazing feature. On the fifteenth day of the eleventh lunar month, which falls in December or January, if you stand on the bridge and look down between 11 p.m. and 1 a.m. (supposing the night is cloudless!), you will see that the moon's reflection in the river is bisected by the bridge, half appearing on one side, half on the other. Since the moon is directly overhead at this time, it throws no shadows. In the past, on more than one occasion, the wooden railings on the bridge have collapsed under the weight of people eager to see this phenomenon. To the north of Wende Bridge is Deyue (Moon-Reaching) Terrace, which used to be a teahouse.

Once under the bridge I looked back at the landing stage

Some of the boats come complete with tour guide (1), the ambience being particularly romantic at night (2). Many dwellings overlook the river (3), one new complex in traditional style housing the Qinhuai Renjia Hotel (4, by Megina Kwan).



1



2

where the lights from the Confucius Temple and the Kuixing Pavilion trembled in the water. As the breeze blew fresh against my cheek, I leaned back, conjuring up the Qinhuai of the past as portrayed in many books and paintings. Lanterns glowing in houses and on terraces, music and singing all night long, dandies in silk garments revelling in restaurants and taverns on both riverbanks while courtesans awaited their pleasure in the 'flower boats' on the river itself....

The boat reached the westernmost end of its circuit and turned back, passing the Confucius Temple again and continuing east. Past Bailu (White Egret) Bridge we came to the age-old Taoye Ferry. Those who live beyond the ferry deserve to be called true Qinhuai residents since they have lived here for generations. Their houses rise directly from the river, with windows only a few metres above your head as you sit in the boat.

The night had turned out very dark and windy. Although there was no moon to light us, as the boat's lanterns swayed, so too did their reflections in the water. At times it seemed that our craft was the only thing left in the universe. Not far beyond the Taoye Ferry, we turned and headed back to our starting point.

When Nanjing people talk about the Confucius Temple, they mean not just the temple but the whole district around it on both sides of the River Qinhuai — an area of several



3

square kilometres. During the Six Dynasties this was a fashionable residential quarter, home to many rich and powerful families. Wuyi (Black Garment) Lane contained the residences of high-ranking officials and prosperous businessmen, among them Xie An, a prime minister of the Eastern Jin dynasty. There is a story about how this lane came by its name. During the time of Wu in the Three Kingdoms Period this was the location of the imperial guards' barracks. The guards were nicknamed the Black Garment Battalion because of the colour of their uniforms — hence the name.

By the time of the Ming and Qing (1368–1911), Qinhuai harboured most of the houses of ill fame — it had become the quarter of the courtesans and prostitutes. Wu Jingzi (1701–1754), author of the novel *The Scholars*, which is set in Ming-dynasty Nanjing, wrote: '... Every year after the fifteenth of the fourth lunar month the scenes at Qinhuai are lovely indeed.... At nightfall, each boat with two lanterns plies to and fro on the river, its reflections in the water brightening everywhere above and below ... and every night music and singing continues

Beijing Opera is performed on the riverbank (1); the charming setting of Wende Bridge (3). The courtesan Li Xiangjun, one of Qinhuai's 'eight beauties', in a portrait (4, by Zhu Ping), her former residence beside the river (5) and her bedchamber (2).



4



5



without let-up.' It is no surprise that this area was the haunt of poets and scholars.

The most celebrated courtesan on the Qinhuai in those days was Li Xiangjun, heroine of the historical drama *Taohua Shan* (*Peach Blossom Fan*) written by Kong Shangren (1648–1718). One of Qinhuai's 'eight beauties', Li is said to have been a woman of firm character. Governor Tian Yang, by dint of his position, was convinced he could persuade her to become his concubine but, in love with the poet Hou Fangyu, she refused again and again. In the end, to convince him that she really meant it, she beat her head against the ground, splattering blood on a fan she was holding. Nonplussed, Tian desisted. Yan Wencong, an artist, transformed the blood stains on the fan into some peach blossoms, hence the name of the drama.

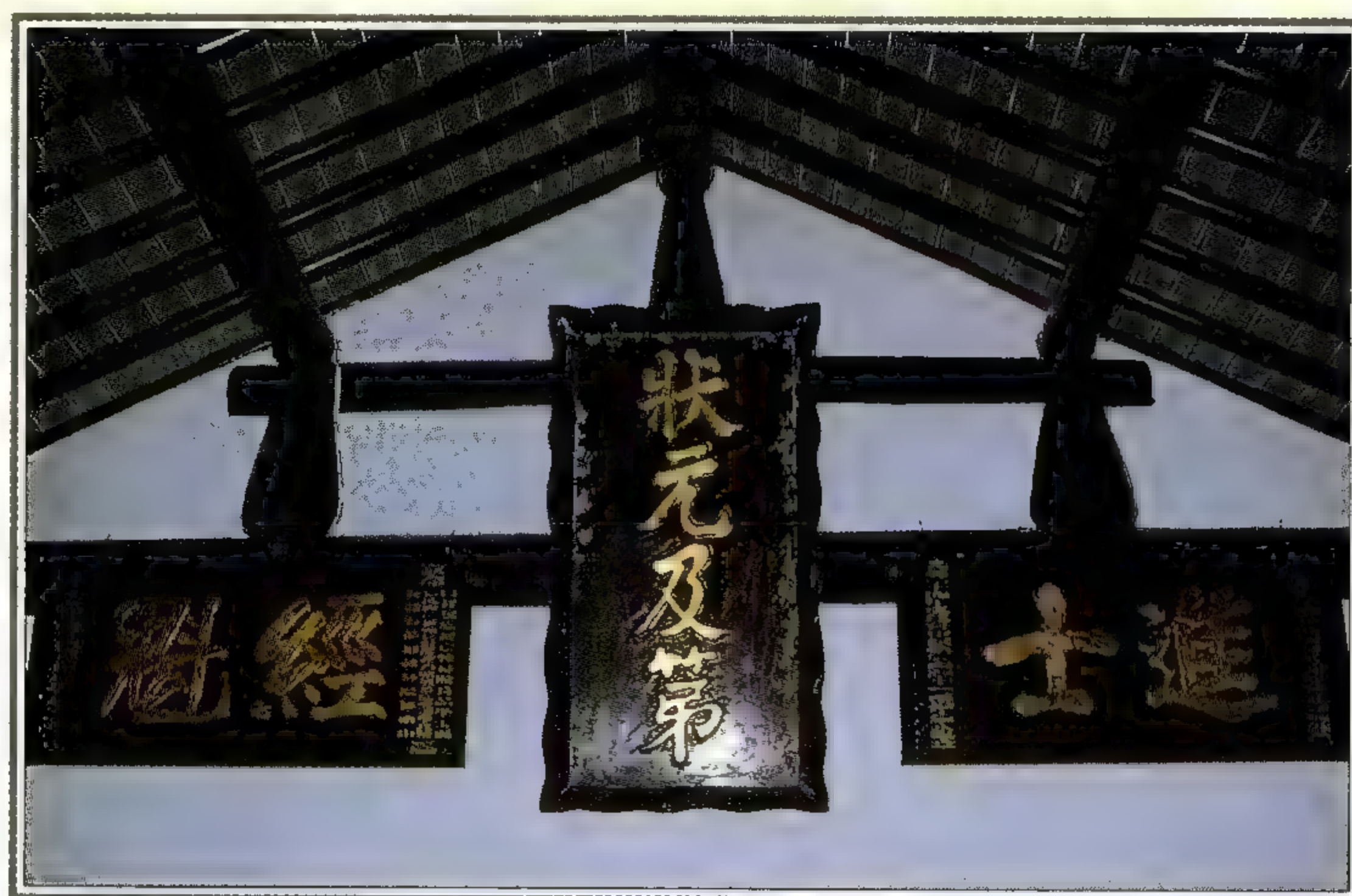
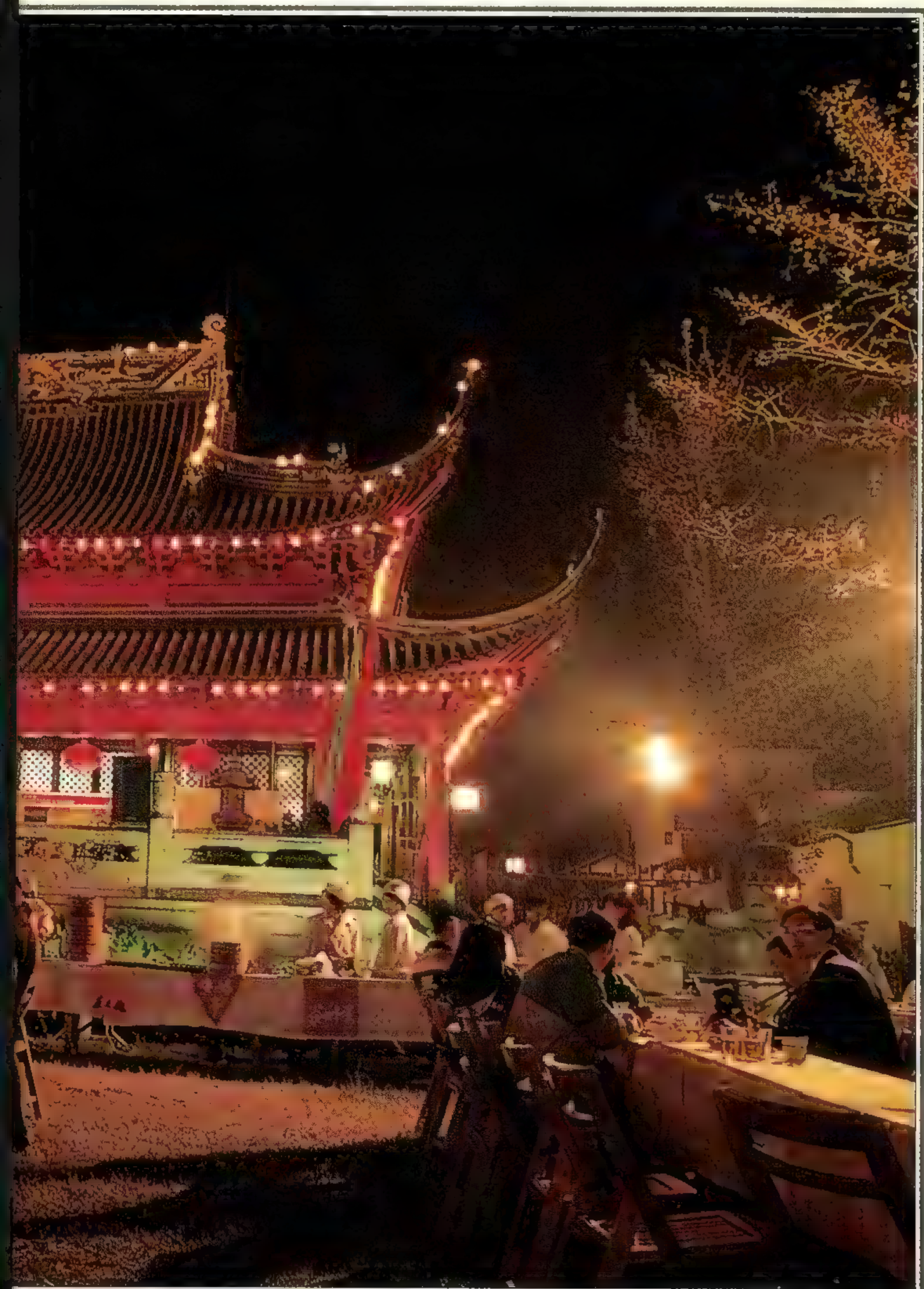
The place where this heroine once lived lies opposite the Confucius Temple on the eastern bank of the river. Known as Meixiang (Charm and Fragrance) Tower, it is a two-storeyed building which is now open to the public. On the ground floor is a dining room and a lounge where Li's admirers waited to be received. The upper floor holds her bedroom and study, simply but elegantly furnished. If you push open the lattice doors and windows opening on to the balcony, the river lies below, drawing the eye.

Strangely, although the River Qinhuai had the reputation of being a place for pleasure, a place to sow wild oats, the district was also the location of a centre for the all-important examinations without which no young man could enter the imperial civil service. This was the Gongyuan, built in the Southern Song dynasty (1127–1279) close to the Confucius Temple. When it was first built, this complex was used for examinations at prefectural and county level only. But by the Ming dynasty it had been expanded repeatedly and was used for Jiangsu and Anhui's provincial examinations as well as for the national-level examinations. In the Qing dynasty, it was named the Jiangnan Gongyuan and was the largest examination complex in the country.

As I walked east from the square in front of the Confucius Temple along Gongyuan Street West, I saw a building with its outer wall painted imperial yellow. This is the Gongyuan's main building, Mingyuan Pavilion.

Under the rigid imperial system, there were very strict rules governing the admission of candidates to the examination complex in order to prevent cheating. For instance, their luggage





was searched, they were only allowed to wear shoes with a very thin sole, they had to wear gowns of silk or cotton, their ink slab must not be too thick, and so on and so forth. Once inside, every candidate was subject to the eagle eye of invigilators who made their rounds continuously. At that time, the Mingyuan Pavilion was the inspection centre and the main examination office.

The numbered cells behind and by the sides of the pavilion were where the candidates actually sat the examination. Apparently, there used to be over 20,000 such cells. I investigated one of them and found it was about two metres high, 1.3 metres deep and only one metre wide. If there were iron bars across the entrance, you might easily think it was a prison cell! Each of these cells contained a full-width wooden desk and a wooden bench. The candidate entered the cell by pulling up the first board (his desk) to take his seat.

Once allocated a numbered cell, the candidate was not permitted to leave the compound before the end of the three-day examination. At night, he would put the two wooden boards which made up his desk and bench together to make a bed. He was permitted to bring along an oilcloth curtain to hang over the entrance to keep out the wind and rain. Kitchen utensils were provided for candidates to cook their own meals inside the Gongyuan.

Exiting from the examination compound and continuing to your left you come to a flower and bird market which is among the most interesting sights in Nanjing. Formerly known as Huashi Dajie or Florists' Market Street and said to have a history of one hundred years, the street is lined with shops selling birds, goldfish and flowers. The flower and goldfish markets are smaller in scale; it's the bird market which is the major attraction. One large shop had a thousand or so occupied birdcages hanging outside. I wondered how anyone could identify which bird was a good singer amongst the general cacophony!

Every day, before daybreak, Nanjing bird fanciers bring their pets here to swap experiences and test the mettle of their birds' singing prowess. Strange as it may sound, the owner just ties one end of a piece of thread to his bird's foot and the other end

A member of a foreign tour group gets a taste of the imperial examination (1, by Megina Kwan) in a 'cell' in the Gongyuan (3). The inscription reads 'Number One Scholar' — in other words, the candidate coming top in the imperial examination (4). The Dacheng Hall at the Confucius Temple (2).



1



2



3



to a small wooden perch or even his own finger to carry it around. As I walked round the market I found most of the bird fanciers were young people. They told me that they took every opportunity to come here and watch the birds — red-billed leiopteryx, thrushes and parrots among them — to learn more about their conformation, singing ability and habits.

There are more markets on either side of the Confucius Temple. Newly renovated in the architectural style of the Ming and Qing dynasties, they are known as the Eastern and Western Bazaars. The things for sale here are mainly traditional items of stationery, arts and crafts, and curios. There is a teashop upstairs.

There is certainly no shortage of eating and refreshment places in the area of the Confucius Temple and Qinhuai. Known as 'Qinhuai snacks', some dishes available here go back more than five hundred years. It is known that there were waterside pavilions selling such tidbits in the Six Dynasties.

Today, on Gongyuan Street West, you will find snack shops with century-old names such as Yongheyuan (Lasting Harmony Garden), Liufengju (Six Phoenix Lodge), Ma Xiang Xing (Prosperous Ma) and Xin Qifangge (New Fancy Fragrance Pavilion) attracting customers with their specialities. Yongheyuan, for example, offers stewed beancurd shreds, crisp sesame-seed cake and steamed dumplings, while Xin Qifangge has 'thousand-layer' cake and beancurd with gravy. My

Folk Craft With a Touch of Smoke

PHOTOS BY
ER DONGQIANG
TEXT BY TIAN HUO





This unusual traditional folk craft comes from the rural areas of northern Shaanxi.

Such pictures are generally produced by women and girls. First, patterns are cut out of a sheet of coarse paper. The cut-out is attached firmly over another piece of white paper and 'smoked' over an oil lamp until sooty black. The superimposed cut-out is removed, leaving behind white patterns on a dark background. The design is then coloured as appropriate and according to the maker's imagination with coarse paints and — *voilà!* — a smoked picture. The influence of the papercuts for which Shaanxi women are famous is evident in the finished effect.

The pictures may be used as decoration in the home or given to celebrate a joyous occasion such as a wedding.

Translated by M.K.

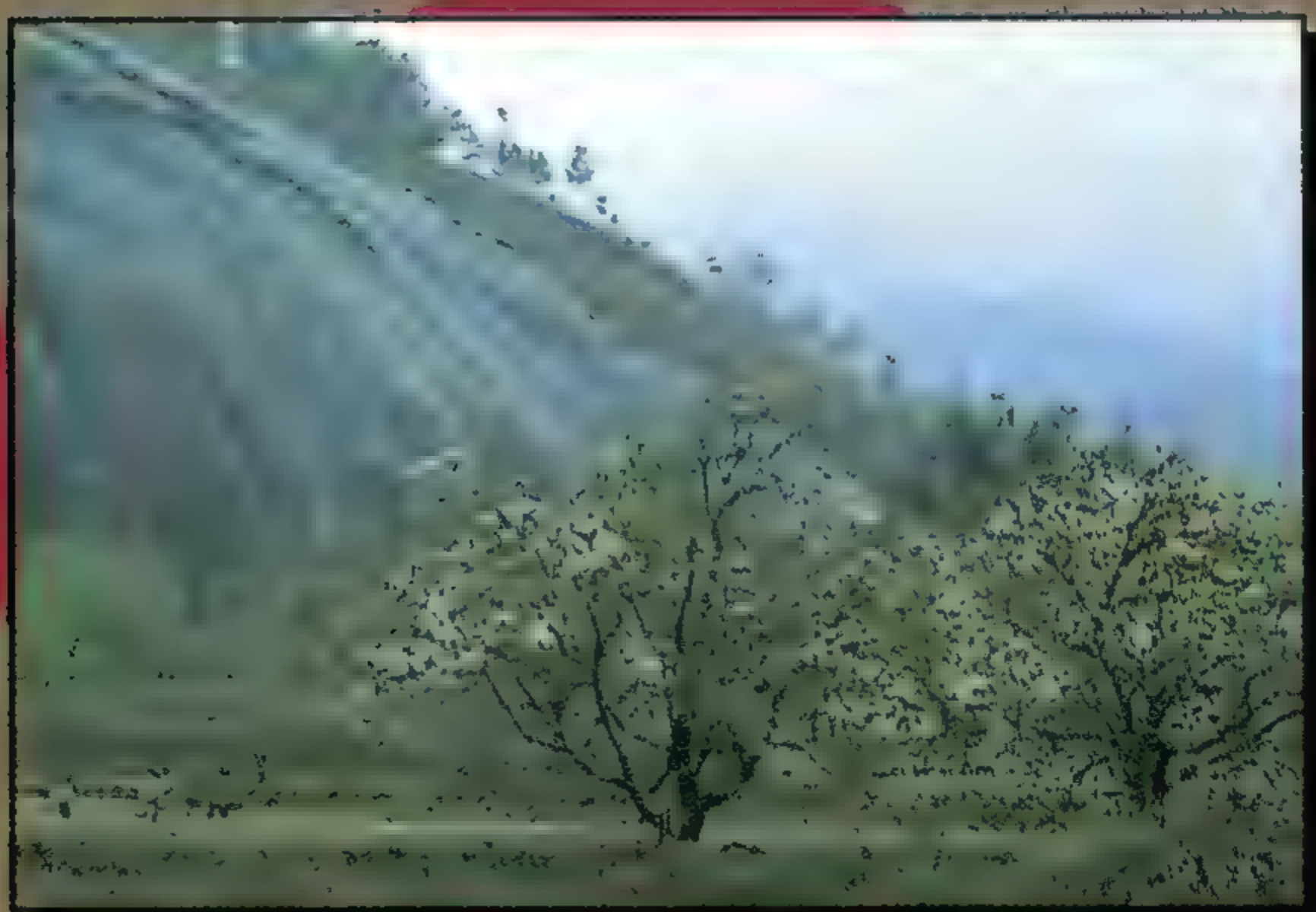


Western Guangdong's Giant Monolith

PHOTOS BY TAI CHI YIN ARTICLE BY YU QIAN



2



3

On the morning of the second day of the first lunar month (which last year fell in February), we hurried to the new China-Hong Kong Ferry Pier in Hong Kong's Tsim Sha Tsui. Boarding a catamaran, the *Lijiang*, we sped west into the Pearl River estuary where we headed upstream along the River Xijiang. Having passed through much of Guangdong, we arrived at Wuzhou in Guangxi at four o'clock in the afternoon, where we promptly took a bus back into Guangdong. In half an hour we reached Jiangkou, the county seat of Fengkai.

After dinner I strolled with a friend along the Xijiang in the twilight. We drew in deep breaths of fresh air, although it was rather cold. New three or four-storeyed buildings could be seen lining the banks of the river. The bulk of the heavy traffic consisted of pedicabs transporting passengers or goods.

We went into a small park and unexpectedly found ourselves in front of the Tower of the Tropic of Cancer. Stopping to read the inscription on the tower, we learned that it is at a latitude of approximately 23° 26' N, exactly on the line of the Tropic of Cancer, the imaginary line separating the tropical from the temperate zones in the northern hemisphere. Inside the tower there was a round hole leading to the top. It is said that at the

summer solstice (21st or 22nd June) the sun shines through this hole directly on to the latitude of the Tropic of Cancer.

Next morning the weather was fine. We hired a car to take us on a two-day trip to all the scenic spots in Fengkai. Leaving Jiangkou we sped along the highway, flanked by paddyfields, to seek out the famous Dabanshi (Giant Speckled Rock). After thirty minutes the car stopped at the foot of a small hill. 'That's Dabanshi,' said our driver, pointing.

Peering out of the car windows, we saw an immense rock towering above us. According to the driver it measured 1,350 metres long by 191 metres high, the equivalent of a fifty-storey skyscraper. It is the second largest granite monolith in the world after Ayers Rock in central Australia. The driver told us that the granite was so smooth and well-preserved, with no fissures marring its surface, that it was impossible to climb. He was right — we tried! There were just a few white speckles in the granite, known as *banshi* or speckled rock, hence the monolith's name.

We continued eastward to the Longshan Cave District, nicknamed 'Little Guilin'. As Fengkai is located at the intersection of sundry different strata, it presents an infinite variety of topographical features resulting from orogenic movements. For example, the giant rock we had just seen was granite, while Longshan Cave is limestone, in other words sedimentary. Another attraction in the locality, Thousand-Tier Peak, a few dozen kilometres away, is shale, again sedimentary. We had not expected our trip to Western Guangdong to turn into a practical geology class!

At the Longshan Caves we saw a cylindrical mass of stalactites hanging from the roof of the limestone caves. A tapestry of strangely-shaped stones has been produced, much like the Ludiyan (Reed Pipe Cave) in Guilin, said by some to contain the most beautiful formations in the world. Those at Longshan Cave are not of this order, but are worth a visit nevertheless.

We walked slowly out of the cave to find that it was growing dark. Once the sun goes down it can be piercingly cold in February in this southern zone. That night we put up at the nearby Wolong (Sleeping Dragon) Mountain Villa.

There the staff informed us that, besides its strange topography, Fengkai also boasts unique ceremonies and social gatherings held in towns and villages by ethnic minorities. The Unicorn and White Horse Dance, a programme performed during the Spring Festival (Lunar New Year), is said to be particularly popular. Remembering that it was still only the fourth day of the New Year, I urged the driver to take us to see this dance.

Looking around on the way, I noticed that Fengkai's farmhouses showed extreme variations in architectural style. Some resembled the 'pot-ear'



houses of Foshan near Guangzhou, others the stone houses you see in Fujian Province. The walls were painted white, yellow and other striking colours, while the roof ridges were decorated with gorgeous-coloured designs, symbols of household peace and tranquillity. According to the driver, the various clans which migrated to mountainous Fengkai during the course of several dynasties preserved their distinctive practices and customs when they settled here. The different shapes and colours of Fengkai houses represent different clans and families.

However, we also saw things in Fengkai which are common in most rural parts of China. The haystacks near the paddyfields for instance. After the autumn harvest, local farmers stack their hay high up on square wooden frames. These serve a dual purpose — not only do they keep the hay dry, they also make it easier for cattle to eat from them, at the same time sheltering from the rain if necessary.

Not far from Fengkai's marker on the Tropic of Cancer (1) lies the monolith Dabanshi (2), second only to Ayers Rock in size. In the surrounding countryside, pear trees bloom (3) and vapour rises from a pond in the cold air (4, by Liang Yongqiang).

After half an hour's drive we stopped in front of a mountain village, which the driver said was his home town. This was where the Unicorn and White Horse Dance was performed every year on this very day.

When we entered the village, the locals weren't quite sure what to make of these unexpected guests. But our driver hastened to make the introductions and women carrying small baskets came forward to greet us. After exchanging pleasantries, they took us to a room in a village house. I was slightly puzzled by the baskets, but wasn't bold enough to ask the reason behind them. I discovered later that each basket contained an iron brazier which held hot coals, used to keep the hands warm in winter. Curious, I borrowed one and held it in my own hands for a while. It certainly worked. My hands were soon as warm as toast! I was quite reluctant to part company with the 'fire basket' as it is called.


Soon gongs and drums could be heard outside. The villagers rushed out from their homes, shouting: 'The unicorn and white horse are here!' Children yelled: 'Let's buy firecrackers with our *laissee* (good luck money) to welcome them!'

Apart from the people playing gongs and drums, the procession included two people 'riding' a paper unicorn and a white paper horse, each holding an umbrella. Preceded by five men, one acting as guide and the other four carrying multi-coloured lanterns, the procession made its way to the village threshing ground. The Unicorn and White Horse Dance is very similar to the lion dance, accompanied by drums and gongs, the dancers moving in turn to the four cardinal points, symbolizing peace in all four seasons.

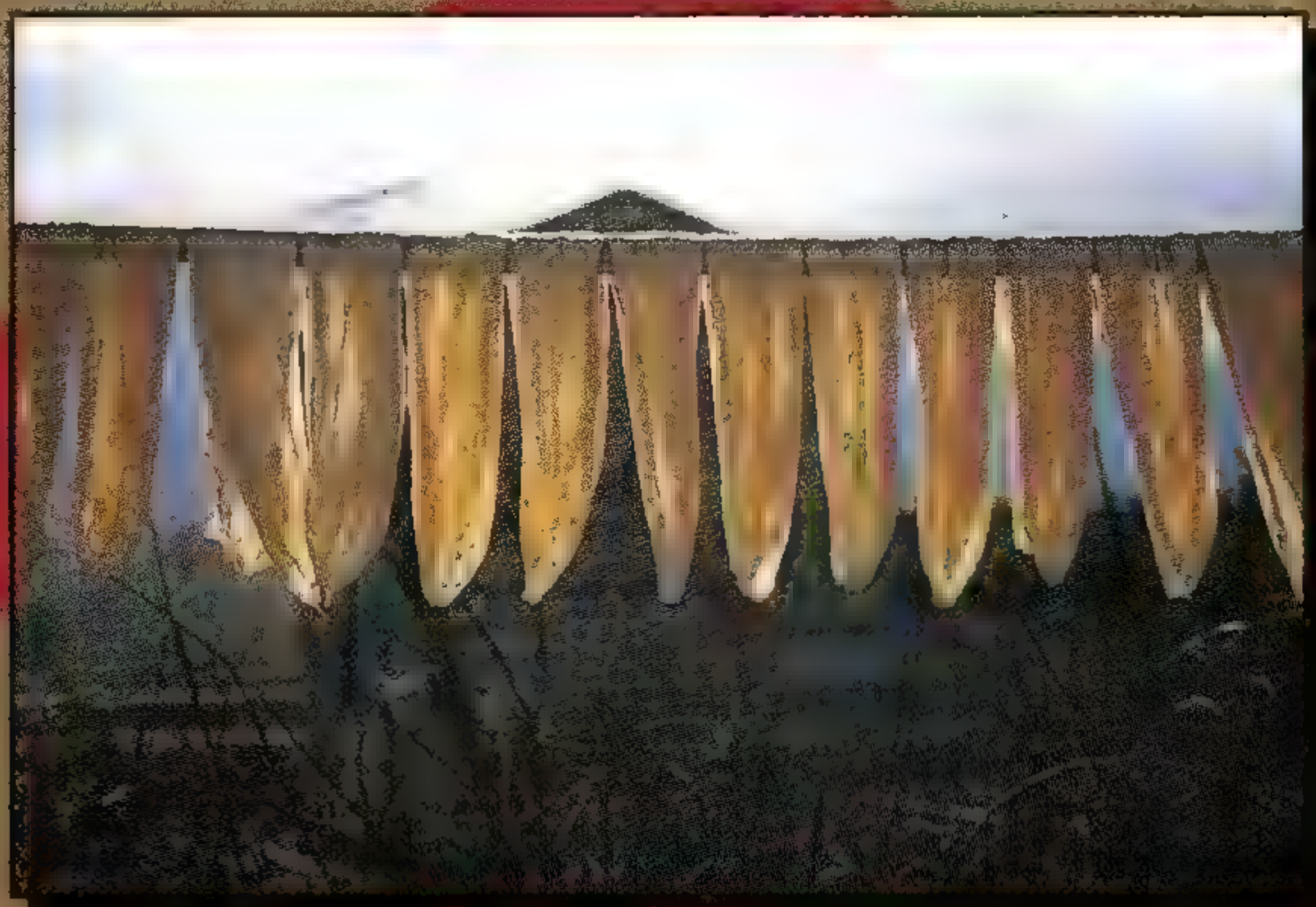
Performers of this dance have a far more difficult time of it than lion or dragon dancers, however. Wearing 'imperial robes', they are expected to move gracefully with their paper props fixed firmly to their bodies, which must be both cumbersome and tiring.

Having expressed their New Year greetings to the villagers, the dance troupe entered the village, where they were given glutinous rice cakes, intended to convey the sincerity of the villagers' good wishes. The elderly people present smiled, happy in the belief that the arrival of the unicorn and white horse dancers foretold an excellent harvest and good luck during the year ahead.

Traditionally, the dancers perform in every village in Fengkai from the fourth to the fifteenth of the first lunar month. According to legend, the dance was created in ancient times to commemorate the true love of a young Fengkai couple. A legacy from the past, the dance now symbolizes happiness and prosperity.

It was late afternoon by the time the dance came to an end. We took our New Year dinner with the villagers before returning to our hotel. These hospitable people gave us a friendly send-off by accompanying us some way on foot, a gesture which touched us deeply.  **Translated by He Fei**

The Unicorn and White Horse Dance (1, Liang Yongqiang) ushers in the new year, along with auspicious characters made from banknotes (3). Beancurd in sheets (2) is a traditional food in Fengkai, where many roof ridges bear colourful decorations (6) and where farmers have an ingenious way of stacking hay (4). 'Fire baskets' make portable handwarmers in winter (5, by Liang Yongqiang).



2



3



4



5



6

The Fire Dragon Dances....

ARTICLE BY YING YANG

Though the sun set long ago, the sky is still bright. Apart from the glow which never fades over bustling Hong Kong, the full moon of mid-autumn has already risen. The normally quiet streets of Tai Hang Village (as it is still known), a small backwater in Causeway Bay, are gradually filling up.

It is the fifteenth day of the eight lunar month, the day of the Mid-Autumn Festival, when the moon is at her largest and most beautiful. Chinese people have celebrated this since time immemorial with lanterns, mooncakes and poems to the moon. But for the residents of Tai Hang, it means even more. On this night, as well as the night before and the night after, the Fire Dragon will bring peace and prosperity to the neighbourhood in the course of its dance. This event, which has been held every year since 1880 (with the exception of 1941 and 1967), also draws crowds of spectators from outside. The next dates for the Fire Dragon Dance will be October 2 to 4 1990.

Tai Hang is now a grid of narrow residential roads and a tiny temple embedded in among the burgeoning high-rises of Causeway Bay behind Victoria Park, the focus for the major celebrations of this family festival. But once it was an isolated village on the north coast of Hong Kong Island, and its Hakka inhabitants lived by fishing and farming. Its Fire Dragon Dance has a strange, even eerie background.

It all started simply enough. In the early autumn of 1880, the village was troubled by a

large python which took up residence and preyed on the farmers' livestock. Late one afternoon, a group of men managed to catch the huge snake and beat it to death, placing the body in a ruined cottage so that they could go back and dispose of it the following day. But when they returned just after dawn, the python's corpse had vanished without trace. The villagers were rather puzzled, but thought no more about it. Shortly afterwards, the village was struck by an epidemic. At this point one of the elders spoke up and related a dream he had had after the python episode. Buddha had appeared to him, telling him that the python was in fact one of the sons of the Dragon King who lived under the sea, and an awful revenge would fall on the villagers for his murder. The only way to rid themselves of the pestilence was to



perform a dance with a fiery dragon, light many joss-sticks and let off great numbers of fire-crackers at the Mid-Autumn Festival. The scared villagers followed Buddha's advice to the letter and the epidemic soon subsided.

Of course, there were sceptics among them who muttered that there was nothing supernatural about it. It was the sulphurous fumes of the incense which had driven off the germs! Still, most of the villagers would believe and do anything if it would help rid them of disease ... to the delight of posterity, which can now enjoy this magnificent spectacle on three nights of the year.


The first signs that preparations are underway are the plumes of smoke rising from several locations on one of the back lanes. The

Photos 1-3 by Wong Chung Fai



1





acid fumes of burning joss-sticks catch at the throat and do dreadful things to one's eyes, but nobody seems deterred. It is still hot and humid at this time of year in Hong Kong, so the men and boys involved in the dragon dance are stripped down to shorts and singlets. A couple of elderly men, obviously with years of dragon-making behind them, crouch around bundles of joss-sticks laid in circles on the ground. Once lit, most of the bundles are taken over to those working on the main part of the dragon, while the rest are inserted all over a couple of pomelo, a local grapefruit-like fruit, to form what will later be 'flaming pearls' for the dragon to chase.

It is fascinating to watch the dragon take shape. Its head is fashioned from strips of rattan

covered with straw and grasses, while the teeth are two saw-edged lengths of metal. The eyes are electric torches! The body itself, a 61-metre-long hemp rope interwoven with grasses, has thirty-two 'joints' for maximum manoeuvrability. Compared to the more usual paper or cloth dragons it seems insubstantial, but it is extremely strong.


This hemp body is a fairly recent innovation. There used to be a large climbing plant growing on a wall in Lung Kai Terrace in the village which had a root of exactly the right shape to make the dragon. Each year the root would be cut off and used, only to grow back again in time for the following year. But this long tradition sadly came to an end when the climber died.

Some 25,000 burning joss-sticks are inserted into the head and along the spine of the dragon — no easy task. By this time the participants and many of the spectators crowded around are sweating profusely and red-eyed from the smoke. It all seems to take a long time, but the atmosphere is that of a good-humoured village carnival and entire families jostle into positions from where they know from experience they will have a good view later.

And then, all of a sudden, towards eight o'clock, there is a rapid roll of drums followed by a quick, exciting beat. Red streamers are fastened to the dragon's horns by an invited VIP, and its eyes are dotted to imbue it with life. Bamboo poles are inserted roughly every two metres along the hempen body ... and, with a concerted effort, the dragon is up and away, slowly at first, but gathering momentum as the scores of dancers warm to their task. The street lights are faint, adding to the drama of the occasion.

The dragon weaves its length all round the village, closely followed by the drummer on a sort of platform on wheels pushed by his escort and replacements. No alley or lane is left out. When the dragon comes close, the night seems even hotter. You are aware of the shouting men and boys who bear its weight, of the smouldering joss-sticks swaying crazily near your face and hair. On the broader stretches, the dragon teases the spectators, rushing forward as they scream and struggle to get out of its way (an impossibility in the crush!), then pulling up short just in time before repeating its playful attack on the crowds opposite. The hordes of excited photographers go wild in the melee, and for a while there is a feeling of genuine hysteria in the sultry air. In the wider marketplace, a procession of charmingly dressed children with lanterns in the shape of stars and clouds take up position. The dragon unleashes a spectacular series of contortions between and around them as they change formation.

From a distance, you can better admire the overall effect of the Fire Dragon. The huge, glowing creature thrashes and writhes its way through the dark, rearing its head up high after every three steps to the right or left.... The 'pearls' move on ahead, their bearers twirling them at incredible speed so that you fear the



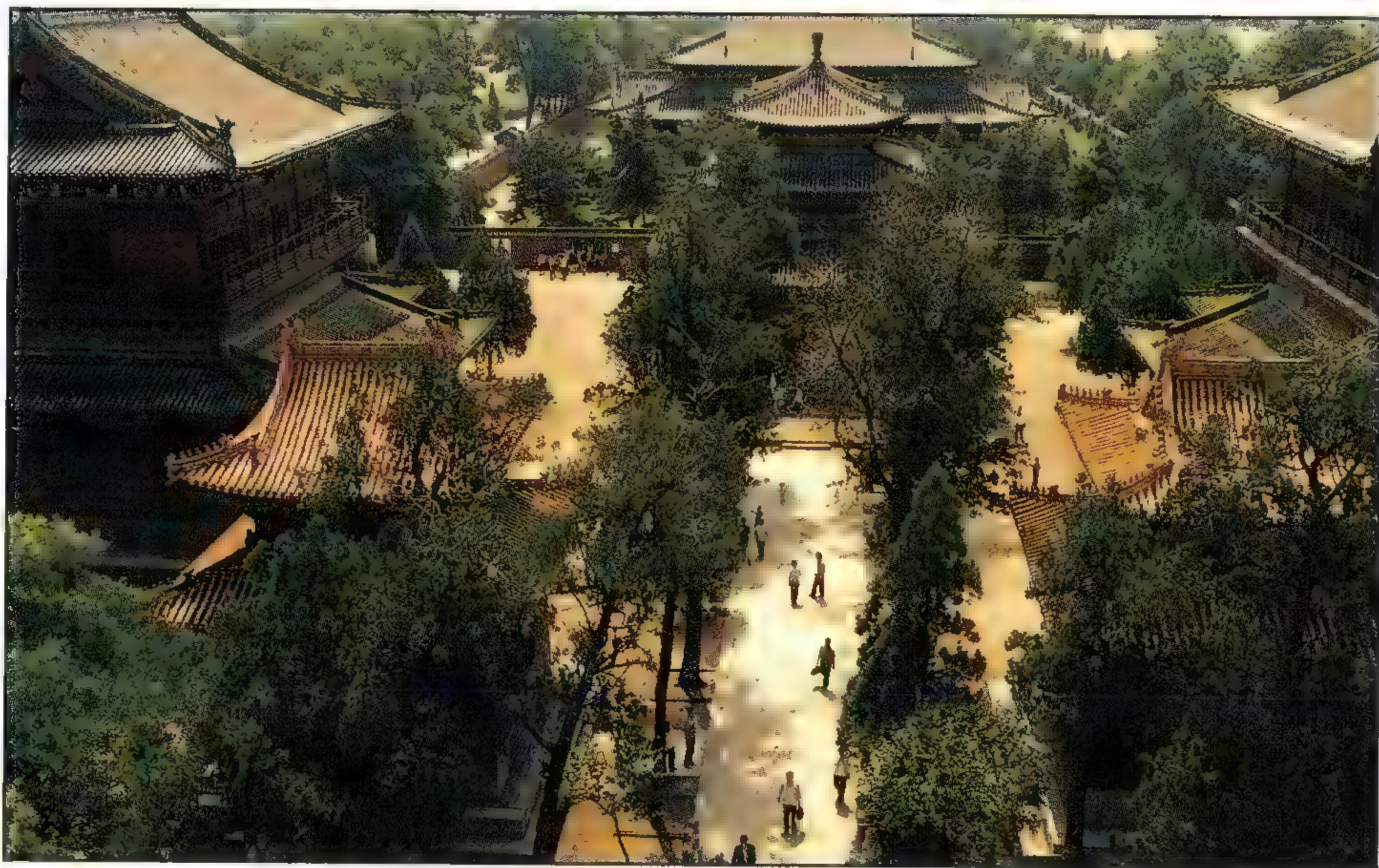
incense sticks will shoot out any minute! But no, the dragon-makers have done their work well, and it is only after an hour of non-stop and sometimes violent motion that the Fire Dragon needs to be tidied up and have its joss-sticks replenished. The dragon dancers do not last so long. They are changing continually; as one dancer gets tired, another one presses forward to take over his bamboo pole.

The third and last evening of the Fire Dragon Dance terminates with a ceremony to 'return the dragon to the sea'. In the past, the villagers believed that the dragon, having been given life in the dance, would cause storms at sea or even a tidal wave when it returned to its natural element. So they used to 'catch' it in the sea after the dance and cut it up in small pieces which were then distributed to the fishermen to fix to the prow of their boats, thereby placing themselves under the Dragon King's protection. But this practice was banned by the Hong Kong authorities in 1982 (something about increasing pollution), so now the dragon is simply dunked in the typhoon shelter at Causeway Bay, then pulled out and sent in a truck to the public incinerator. An ignominious, if fitting, end for such a fiery creature! **G**

Translated by W. Lau

Photos 1-3 by Ma Yiu Chun, 4 by Wong Chung Fai





1

LONGXING MONASTERY

and Its Bronze Bodhisattva

PHOTOS BY YANG ZHIJIAN ARTICLE BY BING YI

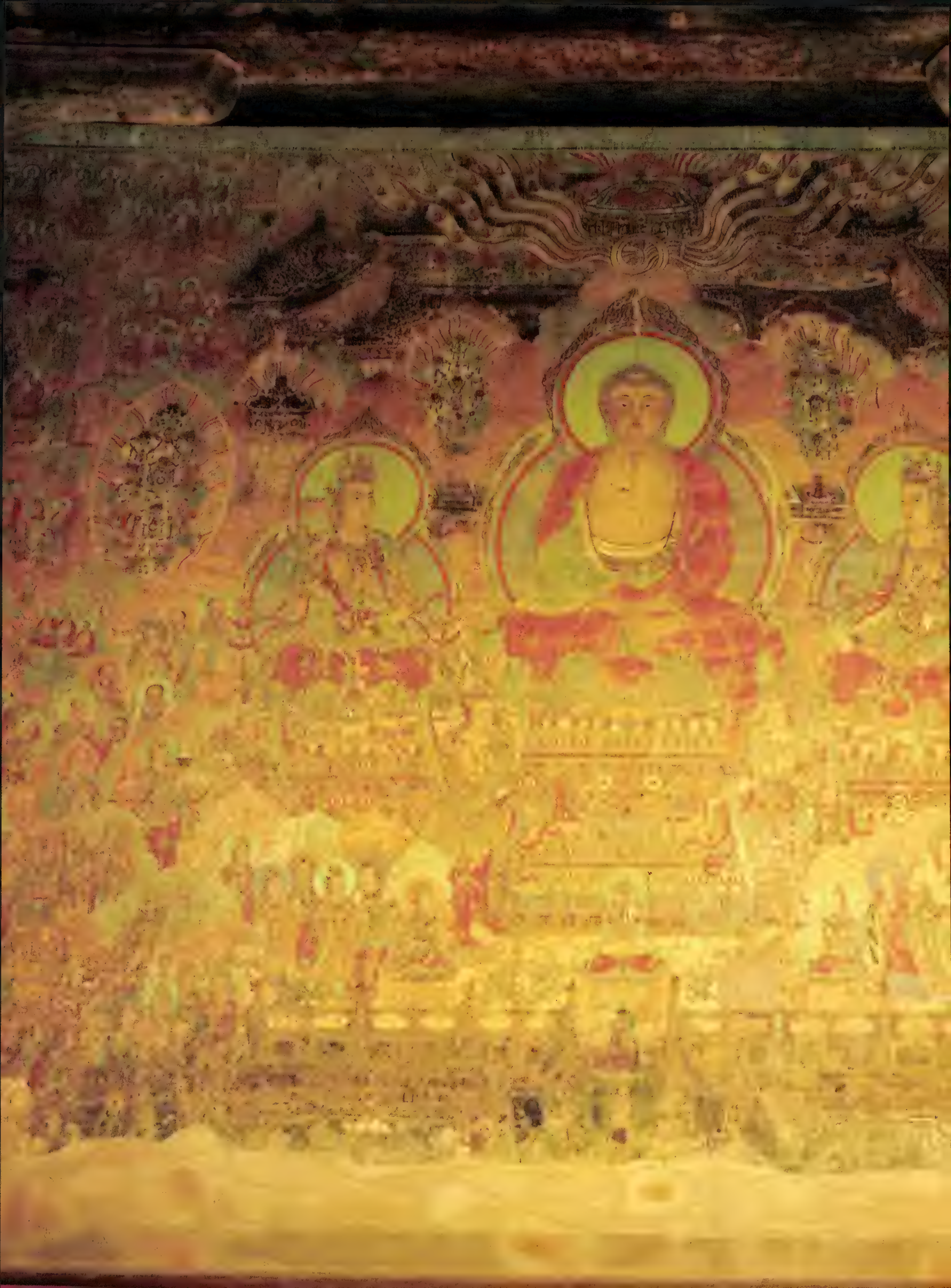
The impressive Longxing Monastery (1) houses the huge bronze Avalokitesvara (3), whose myriad arms symbolize infinite power (2).



2

3





The famous Avalokitesvara, the Bodhisattva of Mercy, which is the pride of Longxing (Prosperity) Monastery in Zhengding County, southwestern Hebei Province, is huge! Standing on its lotus pedestal, the bronze statue is 21.3 metres tall. It has forty-two arms; apart from the pair of arms which are shown with palms pressed together in the Buddhist gesture of greeting, the others hold various objects such as the sun, moon, nectar vessel, mirror and diamond sceptre, all with symbolic meanings in Buddhism. Although the original arms were also of bronze, they were damaged at some stage and were replaced by wooden ones when the statue was restored in 1944.

This Avalokitesvara is known as one of the 'Four Treasures of Hebei', the others being the Iron Lion at Cangzhou, the pagoda at Dingzhou and the stone bridge at Zhaozhou.

The story behind the origin of the statue is inscribed



2

on a stone tablet kept in the monastery. In 969 Zhao Kuangyin, founder of the Song dynasty, stationed his troops in Zhengding during the course of a military expedition to Taiyuan. While there, he learned that a monastery built west of the city during the Tang dynasty (618–907) had once housed a bronze statue 21.3 metres high, which had been destroyed during the Five Dynasties (907–960). On the lotus pedestal of this statue, eight Chinese characters were said to have appeared; they read 'Destroyed when Xian comes and renovated when Song arises' (Xian here refers to the Xiande reign of the Later Zhou of the Five Dynasties). Taking this story as an auspicious omen vouchsafed by the Bodhisattva, the Song

Mahamuni Hall shelters treasures of religious art such as this glowing Ming-dynasty mural (1) and an exquisite clay image of Avalokitesvara (2).

emperor there and then promised to recast the statue ten times larger than before. As the monastery was unable to house such a colossus, he ordered construction of a new multi-storeyed building – the present-day Dabei Hall at Longxing Monastery east of Zhengding.

This monastery was first started in 586 in the Sui dynasty (581–618). Most of the temples and halls which we see today date from the Ming and Qing dynasties (1368–1911), but they still retain the layout and style of the complex from when it was enlarged during Song times. The monastery has an area of 50,000 square metres. It consists of ten or more buildings disposed symmetrically on either side of a central north-south axis containing the major religious structures.

South of Dabei Hall on this central axis stands Mahamuni Hall, built in 1052 during the Northern Song. Seen from the air, the hall has a cruciform layout with a wing radiating out in each of the four directions of the compass from the central body of the hall. Inside, it is resplendent with murals painted in the fifteenth century during the Ming dynasty. Like a huge picture book spread out over the walls, these portray Buddhist themes, including the life of Sakyamuni from birth to Nirvana. One scene, executed with flowing lines in a wide palette of colours, depicts the beautiful scenery of the Western Paradise, while – in one square metre in the lower left of this scene – we see all the sufferings of humanity from birth through illness and old age to death executed in a shadowy grey. The contrast is extreme, as was intended by the unknown artists.

Apart from the murals, this hall houses a three-dimensional Buddhist 'mountain' dotted with colourful rocks and clouds among which is seated, cross-legged, another Avalokitesvara. But this one is quite different from the usual image, much closer to the 'female' Guanyin, relaxed and graceful, who is the sinicized version of the Bodhisattva. Bordering on the sensuous, this exquisite clay moulding dates from 1563.

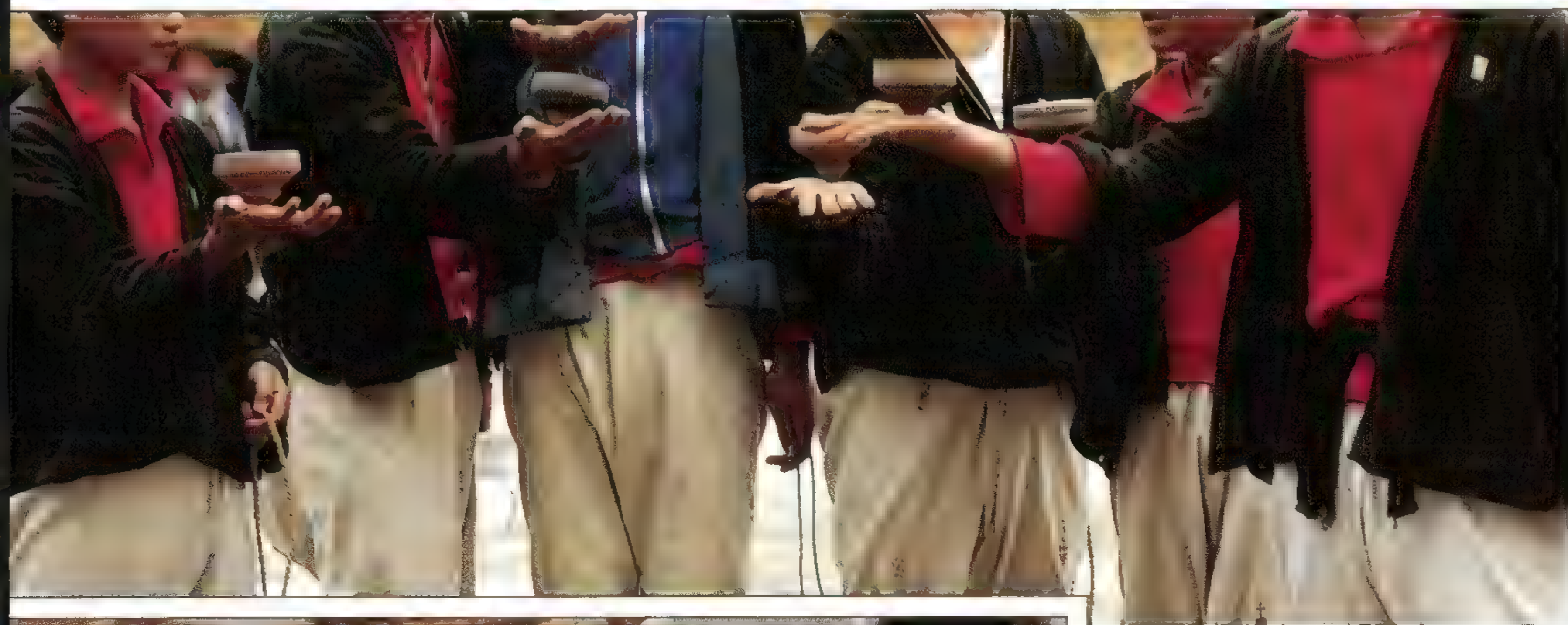
At the northern end of the central axis of monastery buildings stands the Ming-dynasty Vairocana Hall, dating from the early seventeenth century. This building was originally situated at the Chongyin Monastery in Zhengding itself, but was moved and reconstructed here in 1959. Dedicated to Vairocana, the Buddha of Supreme Wisdom, this hall houses the so-called Vairocana Tower. This too is of bronze and is composed of three tiers producing a stupa shape 6.3 metres high. Each tier or lotus throne is topped by a shaft composed of four busts of Vairocana, each of which makes the *mudra* (ritual hand gesture) of *vitarka* (mental reflection). The body of each of the tiers is a mass of tiny Buddhas, said to total 1,092.

There is another fascinating story connected with the monastery, this time concerning its ceremonial main gate (or rather its lack of one). Legend has it that Yuchi Gong, the general charged with extension of the monastery during the Tang dynasty, was recalled to court when everything except the main gate had been completed. Since he dared not disobey the imperial edict, he was forced to leave the monastery unfinished. But, as he reached Kaifeng in Henan Province, he was overtaken by the construction workers seeking his instructions as to where they should put the main gate. Distracted and in a hurry, the general pointed his whip at random and the workers, misunderstanding, built the main gate on the spot he had seemed to indicate – in Kaifeng! Hence the saying: 'Longxing Monastery is so big that its main gate is in Henan.'



The surface of the Vairocana Tower is studded with over one thousand tiny Buddhas

Translated by Gu Weizhou



The Spring Festival in a Spin

PHOTOS & TEXT
BY YANG YANG

Every Spring Festival, which falls in February by the Western calendar, the most exciting event for the inhabitants of a mountain village of the White-Trousered Yao (a minor branch of the Yao nationality) in Libo County, south-eastern Guizhou Province, is the annual top-spinning competition. Local people therefore know this as the Top Festival.

The competition takes place on a flat piece of ground in the village. More than ten lads stand there, each of them with a top. In front of them

stands an old man who is highly respected in the village and is acting as umpire, his decision being final.

'Get ready!' shouts the umpire, and the competitors place their tops firmly on the ground, pointed side down, flat side up, gently holding the top with one hand while the other grasps the string surrounding the top. 'Go!'

All the lads tug hard on the string and the tops fly into the air, describing perfect parabolas against the blue of the sky. The spectators burst into cheers. Meanwhile, the tops land one after the other, spinning ever faster, as the competitors watch, lips taut, eyes narrowed, hopes high. Their excitement is understandable; the winner of the contest will likely be considered the catch of the season!

But the highlight is yet to come. The competitors split into two teams. One team

launches its top, followed by the other team, the intention being to force the opposing team's top to lose momentum and fall over on its side. Then the two teams change sides and repeat their attack. The winner is the team with the largest number of successful attacks. As the teams match their tops like this, the roars and cheers of the crowd become deafening.

The youths involved make careful preparations for this annual event. As the Lunar New Year approaches, they go deep into the mountains to look for branches the diameter of a large bowl. The branches are cut into pieces about fifteen centimetres long. One side is whittled into a point, the other is flattened, while a groove is cut around the middle to take the string needed to whip the top. Some tops weigh around half a kilo, but really big ones can be as much as one and a half kilos. The boys ornament the tops with painted designs to show off their skills to best advantage.

These people of the White-Trousered Yao all know how to make and operate tops, no matter what their age. Even while the competition is underway, you can see children on the sidelines playing with tops in a variety of styles. But whether the tops are whipped on the ground or spun on the palm, they remain firm and stable throughout.

Translated by Annette Lee

***If jade is not cut and polished, it
cannot become something valuable.***

玉不琢

.....



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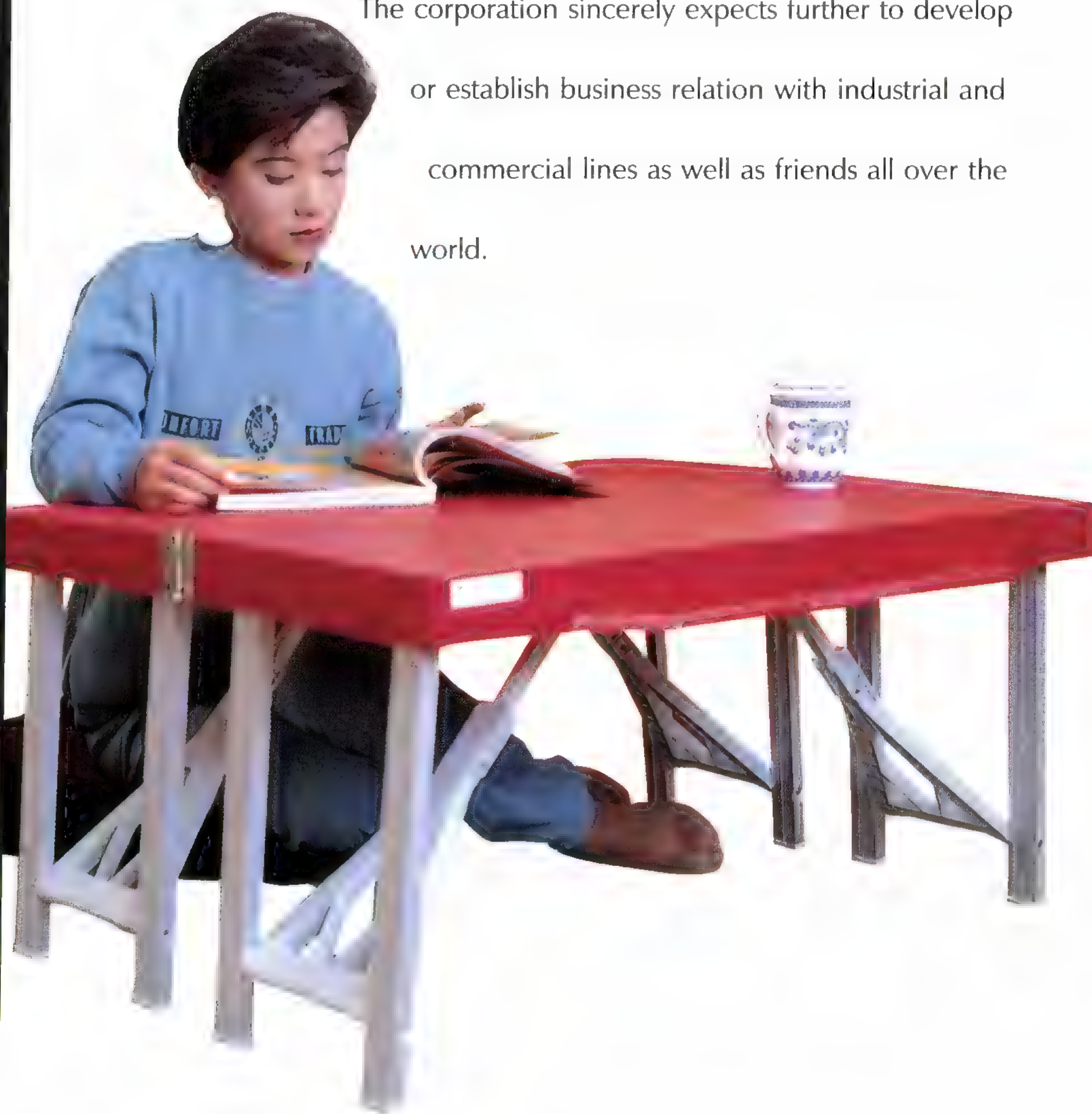
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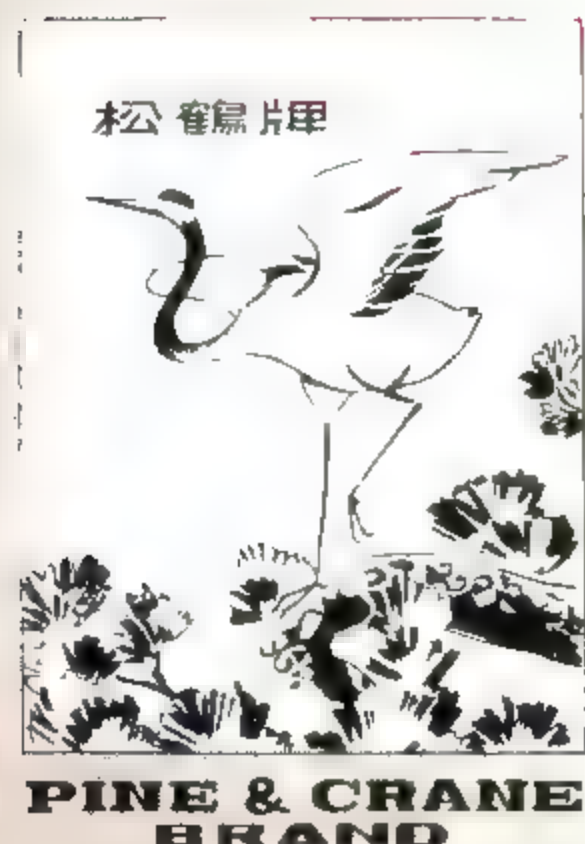
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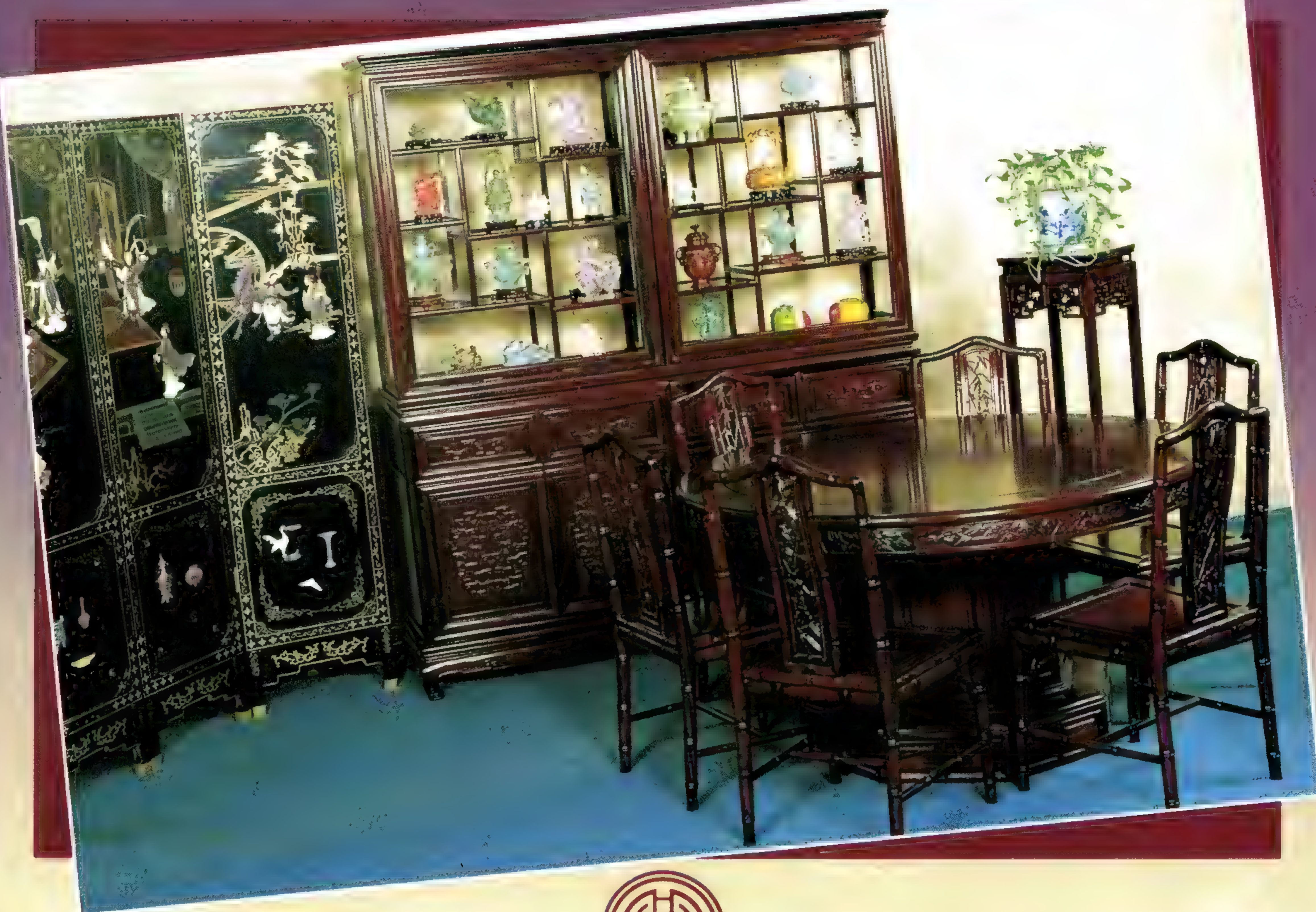
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PHOTOGRAPHER: LIANG LICHANG



Excitement reaches its peak as a flurry of firecrackers erupts all along the river banks, and the dragon boats take a great leap forward. Common throughout the south, dragon boat races are held at Duanwu (Double Five), the fifth day of the fifth lunar month, to commemorate the poet and frustrated statesman Qu Yuan who lived around 340-278 B.C. But they are probably linked to even more ancient rites centred on a dragon totem. 

Teaware of Purple Clay

PHOTOS BY TANG ZAIQING
TEXT BY JIN XIAODONG





Another of the numerous collectors in Shanghai who have turned their homes into private mini-museums, Xu Sihai is a devotee of teaware. His collection includes a considerable number of the fine *zisha* or purple clay teapots for which Yixing in Jiangsu Province is particularly famous (see CHINA TOURISM no. 99). Apart from their beauty and elegance, such teapots are said to have special properties, including keeping tea-leaves from going bad when left in the pot overnight.

Xu has also made a name for himself as a potter. So, while he is assiduously collecting teapots made by others, his own products are much in demand (for example, nos. 1, 4, 8 and 10 shown here).

After more than twenty years of collecting, Xu Sihai owns more than a hundred teapots, both antiques and contemporary works. Some of his pots are ultra-modern, others date to the Qing dynasty (1644-1911). Nos. 6 and 9 here are from the early part of that dynasty, no. 2 from the Kangxi reign (1662-1722) and no. 5 from the Qianlong reign (1736-1795). Counting his own creations, he now has over 250 pieces on display in *padauk* (a rare hardwood) cabinets in a forty-square-metre room of his house at 38 Lane, 480, Yuyuan Road, Shanghai.

Translated by M.K.



Spring Silk

This month we bring you the final half of the short story *Spring Silkworms* by Mao Tun (1896–1981), which the influential author wrote in 1932. In it he paints a vivid picture of the collapse of China's rural economy in the early 1930s as a result of overwhelming political and social pressures.

Readers who would like to know more about the fate of Old Tung Pao, Ah To, Sixth Treasure and the other residents of the village after reading this extract may be interested to learn that this short story is one of a trilogy, all included in the same collection of short stories. *Autumn Harvest* and *Winter Ruin* chart the further downward spiral as social unrest escalates ... as the starving farmers raid the rice bins of grain merchants and better-off households in a vain attempt to keep going.

But first let's return to the villagers' more immediate problems half-way through the spring silkworm campaign, as they teeter between hope and despair.

No one could guess how much the "little darlings" would eat before they spun their cocoons. Old Tung Pao discussed the question of buying more leaves with Ah Sze.

"Master Chen won't lend us any more. Shall we try your father-in-law's boss again?"

"We've still got ten loads coming. That's enough for one more day," replied Ah Sze. He could barely hold himself erect. His eyelids weighed a thousand catties. They kept wanting to close.

"One more day? You're dreaming!" snapped the old man impatiently. "Not counting tomorrow, they still have to eat three more days. We'll need another thirty loads! Thirty loads, I say!"

Loud voices were heard outside on the threshing ground. Ah To had arrived with men delivering five loads of mulberry branches. Everyone went out to strip the leaves. Ah Sze's wife hurried from the shed. Across the stream, Sixth Treasure and her family were raising only a small crop of silkworms; having spare time, she came over to help. Bright stars filled the sky. There was a slight wind. All up and down the village, gay shouts and laughter rang in the night.

"The price of leaves is rising fast!" a coarse voice cried. "This afternoon, they were getting four dollars a load in the market town!"

Old Tung Pao was very upset. At four dollars a load, thirty loads would come to a hundred and twenty dollars. Where could he raise so much money! But then he figured — he was sure to gather over five hundred catties of cocoons. Even at fifty dollars a hundred, they'd sell for two hundred and fifty dollars. Feeling a bit consoled, he heard a small voice from among the leaf-strippers.

"They say the folks east of here aren't doing

so well with their silkworms. There won't be any reason for the price of leaves to go much higher."

Old Tung Pao recognized the speaker as Sixth Treasure, and he relaxed still further.

The girl and Ah To were standing beside a large basket, stripping leaves. In the dim starlight, they worked quite close to each other, partly hidden by the pile of mulberry branches before them. Suddenly, Sixth Treasure felt someone pinch her thigh. She knew well enough who it was, and she suppressed a giggle. But when, a moment later, a hand brushed against her breasts, she jumped; a little shriek escaped her.

"What's wrong?" demanded Ah Sze's wife, working on the other side of the basket.

Sixth Treasure's face flamed scarlet. She shot a glance at Ah To, then quickly lowered her head and resumed stripping leaves. "Nothing," she replied. "I think a caterpillar bit me!"

Ah To bit his lips to keep from laughing aloud. He had been half starved the past two weeks and had slept little. But in spite of having lost a lot of weight, he was in high spirits. While he never suffered from any of Old Tung Pao's gloom, neither did he believe that one good crop, whether of silkworms or of rice, would enable them to wipe off their debt and own their own land again. He knew they would never "get out from under" merely by relying on hard work, even if they broke their backs trying. Nevertheless, he worked with a will. He enjoyed work, just as he enjoyed fooling around with Sixth Treasure.

The next morning, Old Tung Pao went into town to borrow money for more leaves. Before leaving home, he had talked the matter over with daughter-in-law. They had decided to mortgage their grove of mulberries that produced fifteen loads of leaves a year as security for the loan. The grove was the last piece of property the family owned.

By the time the old man ordered another thirty loads, and the first ten were delivered, the sturdy "little darlings" had gone hungry for half an hour. Putting forth their pointed little mouths, they swayed from side to side, searching for food. Daughter-in-law's heart had ached to see them. When the leaves were finally spread in the trays, the silkworm shed at once resounded with a sibilant crunching, so noisy it drowned out conversation. In a very short while, the trays were again empty of leaves. Another thick layer was piled on. Just keeping the silkworms supplied with leaves, Old Tung Pao and his family were so busy they could barely catch their breath. But this was the final crisis. In two more days the "little darlings" would spin their cocoons. People were putting every bit of their remaining strength into this last desperate struggle.

* * * *

The "little darlings" began spinning their cocoons, but Old Tung Pao's family was still in a sweat. Both their money and their energy were completely spent. They still had nothing to show for it; there was no guarantee of their earning any return. Nevertheless, they continued working at top speed. Beneath the racks on which the cocoons were being spun fires had to be kept going to supply warmth. Old Tung Pao and Ah Sze, his elder son, their backs bent, slowly squatted first on this side then on that. Hearing the small rustlings of the spinning silkworms, they wanted to smile, and if the sounds stopped for a moment their hearts stopped too. Yet, worried as they were, they didn't dare to disturb the silkworms by looking inside. When the silkworms squirted fluid in their faces as they peered up from beneath the racks, they were happy in spite of the momentary discomfort. The bigger the shower, the better they liked it.*

Ah To had already peeked several times. Little Pao had caught him at it and demanded to know what was going on. Ah To made an ugly face at the child, but did not reply.

After three days of "spinning," the fires were extinguished. Ah Sze's wife could restrain herself no longer. She stole a look, her heart beating fast. Inside, all was white as snow. The brush that had been put in for the silkworms to spin on was completely covered over with cocoons. Ah Sze's wife had never seen so successful a "flowering"!

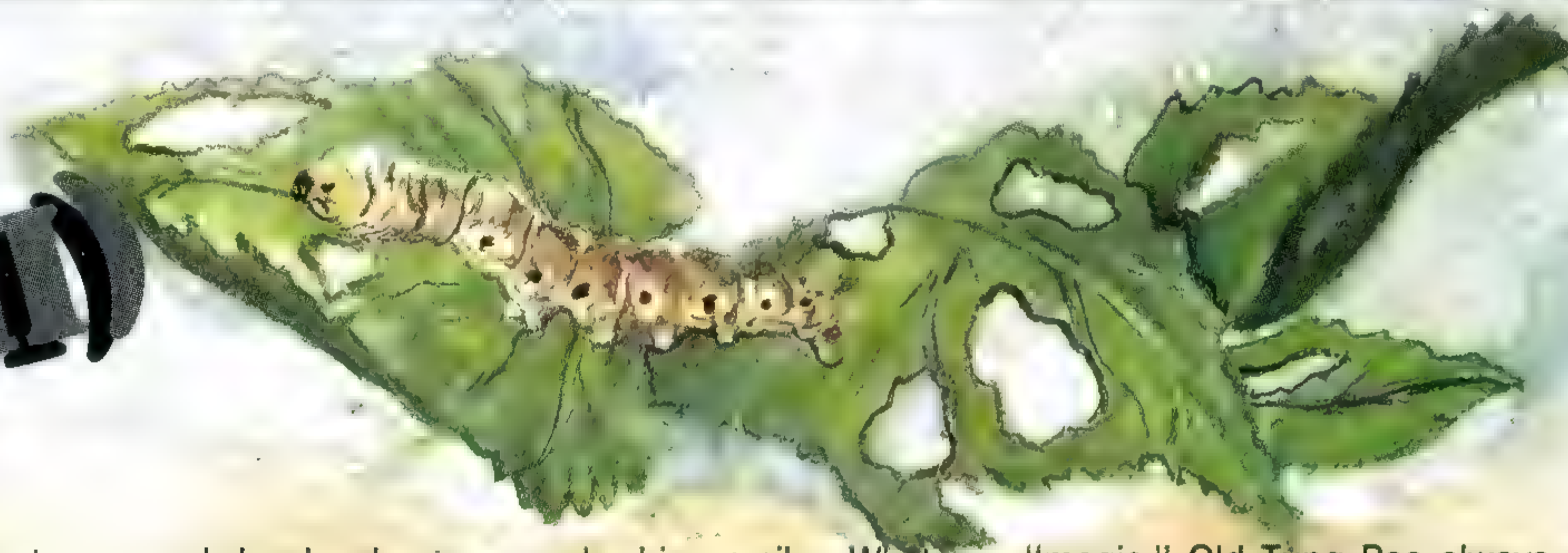
The whole family was wreathed in smiles. They were on solid ground at last! The "little darlings" had proved they had a conscience; they hadn't consumed those mulberry leaves, at four dollars a load, in vain. The family could reap its reward for a month of hunger and sleepless nights. The Old Lord of the Sky had eyes!

Throughout the village, there were many similar scenes of rejoicing. The Silkworm Goddess had been beneficent to the tiny village this year. Most of the two dozen families garnered good crops of cocoons from their silkworms. The harvest of Old Tung Pao's family was well above average.

Again women and children crowded the threshing ground and the banks of the little stream. All were much thinner than the previous month, with eyes sunk in their sockets, throats rasping and hoarse. But everyone was excited, happy. As they chattered about the struggle of the past month, visions of piles of bright silver dollars shimmered before their eyes. Cheerful thoughts filled their minds — they would get their summer clothes out of the pawnshop; at Dragon-Boat Festival perhaps they could eat a fat golden fish....

They talked, too, of the farce enacted by Lotus and Ah To a few nights before. Sixth

Worms (III)



Treasure announced to everyone she met, "That Lotus has no shame at all. She delivered herself right to his door!" Men who heard her laughed coarsely. Women muttered a prayer and called Lotus bad names. They said Old Tung Pao's family could consider itself lucky that a curse hadn't fallen on them. The gods were merciful!

Family after family was able to report a good harvest of cocoons. People visited one another to view the shining white gossamer. The father of Old Tung Pao's daughter-in-law came from town with his little son. They brought gifts of sweets and fruits and a salted fish. Little Pao was happy as a puppy frolicking in the snow.

The elderly visitor sat with Old Tung Pao beneath a willow beside the stream. He had the reputation in town of a "man who knew how to enjoy life." From hours of listening to the professional story-tellers in front of the temple, he had learned by heart many of the classic tales of ancient times. He was a great one for idle chatter, and often would say anything that came into his head. Old Tung Pao therefore didn't take him very seriously when he leaned close and queried softly:

"Are you selling your cocoons, or will you spin the silk yourself at home?"

"Selling them, of course," Old Tung Pao replied casually.

The elderly visitor slapped his thigh and sighed, then rose abruptly and pointed at the silk filature rearing up behind the row of mulberries, now quite bald of leaves.

"Tung Pao," he said, "the cocoons are being gathered, but the doors of the silk filatures are shut as tight as ever! They're not buying this year! Ah, all the world is in turmoil! The silk houses are not going to open, I tell you!"

Old Tung Pao couldn't help smiling. He wouldn't believe it. How could he possibly believe it? There were dozens of silk filatures in this part of the country. Surely they couldn't all shut down? What's more, he had heard that they had made a deal with the Japanese; the Chinese soldiers who had been billeted in the silk houses had long since departed.

Changing the subject, the visitor related the latest town gossip, salting it freely with classical aphorisms and quotations from the ancient stories. Finally he got around to the thirty silver dollars borrowed through him as middleman. He said his boss was anxious to be repaid.

Old Tung Pao became uneasy after all. When his visitor had departed, he hurried from the village down the highway to look at the two nearest silk filatures. Their doors were indeed shut; not a soul was in sight. Business was in full swing this time last year, with whole rows of dark gleaming scales in operation.

He felt a little panicky as he returned home. But when he saw those snowy cocoons, thick

and hard, pleasure made him smile. What beauties! No one wants them? — Impossible. He still had to hurry and finish gathering the cocoons; he hadn't thanked the gods properly yet. Gradually, he forgot about the silk houses.

But in the village, the atmosphere was changing day by day. People who had just begun to laugh were now all frowns. News was reaching them from town that none of the neighbouring silk filatures was opening its doors. It was the same with the houses along the highway. Last year at this time buyers of cocoons were streaming in and out of the village. This year there wasn't a sign of even half a one. In their place came dunning creditors and government tax collectors who promptly froze up if you asked them to take cocoons in payment.

Swearing, curses, disappointed sighs! With such a fine crop of cocoons the villagers had never dreamed that their lot would be even worse than usual! It was as if hailstones dropped out of a clear sky. People like Old Tung Pao, whose crop was especially good, took it hardest of all.

"What is the world coming to!" He beat his breast and stamped his feet in helpless frustration.

But the villagers had to think of something. The cocoons would spoil if kept too long. They either had to sell them or remove the silk themselves. Several families had already brought out and repaired silk reels they hadn't used for years. They would first remove the silk from the cocoons and then see about the next step. Old Tung Pao wanted to do the same.

"We won't sell our cocoons; we'll spin the silk ourselves!" said the old man. "Nobody ever heard of selling cocoons until the foreign devils' companies started the thing!"

Ah Sze's wife was the first to object. "We've got over five hundred catties of cocoons here," she retorted. "Where are you going to get enough reels?"

She was right. Five hundred catties was no small amount. They'd never get finished spinning the silk themselves. Hire outside help? That meant spending money. Ah Sze agreed with his wife. Ah To blamed his father for planning incorrectly.

"If you listened to me, we'd have raised only one tray of foreign breed and no locals. Then the fifteen loads of leaves from our own mulberry trees would have been enough, and we wouldn't have had to borrow!"

Old Tung Pao was so angry he couldn't speak.

At last a ray of hope appeared. Huang the Priest had heard somewhere that a silk house below the city of Wusih was doing business as usual. Actually an ordinary peasant, Huang was nicknamed "The Priest" because of the learned airs he affected and his interests in Taoist

"magic." Old Tung Pao always got along with him fine. After learning the details from him, Old Tung Pao conferred with his elder son Ah Sze about going to Wusih.

"It's about 270 *li* by water, six days for the round trip," ranted the old man. "Son of a bitch! It's a goddam expedition! But what else can we do? We can't eat the cocoons, and our creditors are pressing hard!"

Ah Sze agreed. They borrowed a small boat and bought a few yards of matting to cover the cargo. It was decided that Ah To should go along. Taking advantage of the good weather, the cocoon selling "expeditionary force" set out.

Five days later, the men returned — but not with an empty hold. They still had one basket of cocoons. The silk filature, which they reached after a 270-*li* journey by water, offered extremely harsh terms — Only thirty-five dollars a load for foreign breed, twenty for local; thin cocoons not wanted at any price. Although their cocoons were all first class, the people at the silk house picked and chose, leaving them one basket of rejects. Old Tung Pao and his sons received a hundred and ten dollars for the sale, ten of which had to be spent as travel expenses. The hundred dollars remaining was not even enough to pay back what they had borrowed for that last thirty loads of mulberry leaves! On the return trip, Old Tung Pao became ill with rage. His sons carried him into the house.

Ah Sze's wife had no choice but to take the ninety odd catties they had brought back and reel the silk from the cocoons herself. She borrowed a few reels from Sixth Treasure's family and worked for six days. All their rice was gone now. Ah Sze took the silk into town, but no one would buy it. Even the pawnshop didn't want it. Only after much pleading was he able to persuade the pawnbroker to take it in exchange for a load of rice they had pawned before Clear and Bright.

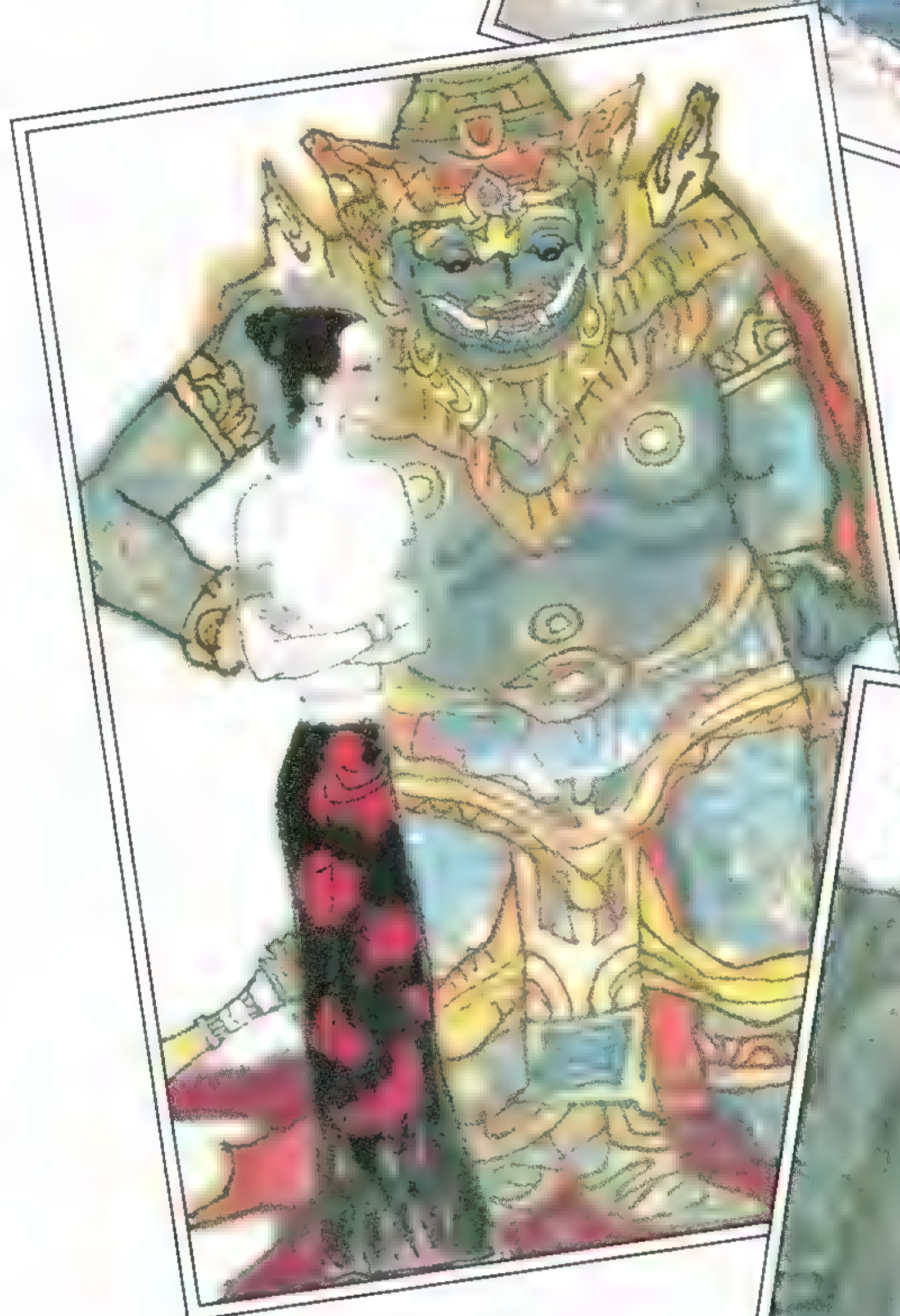
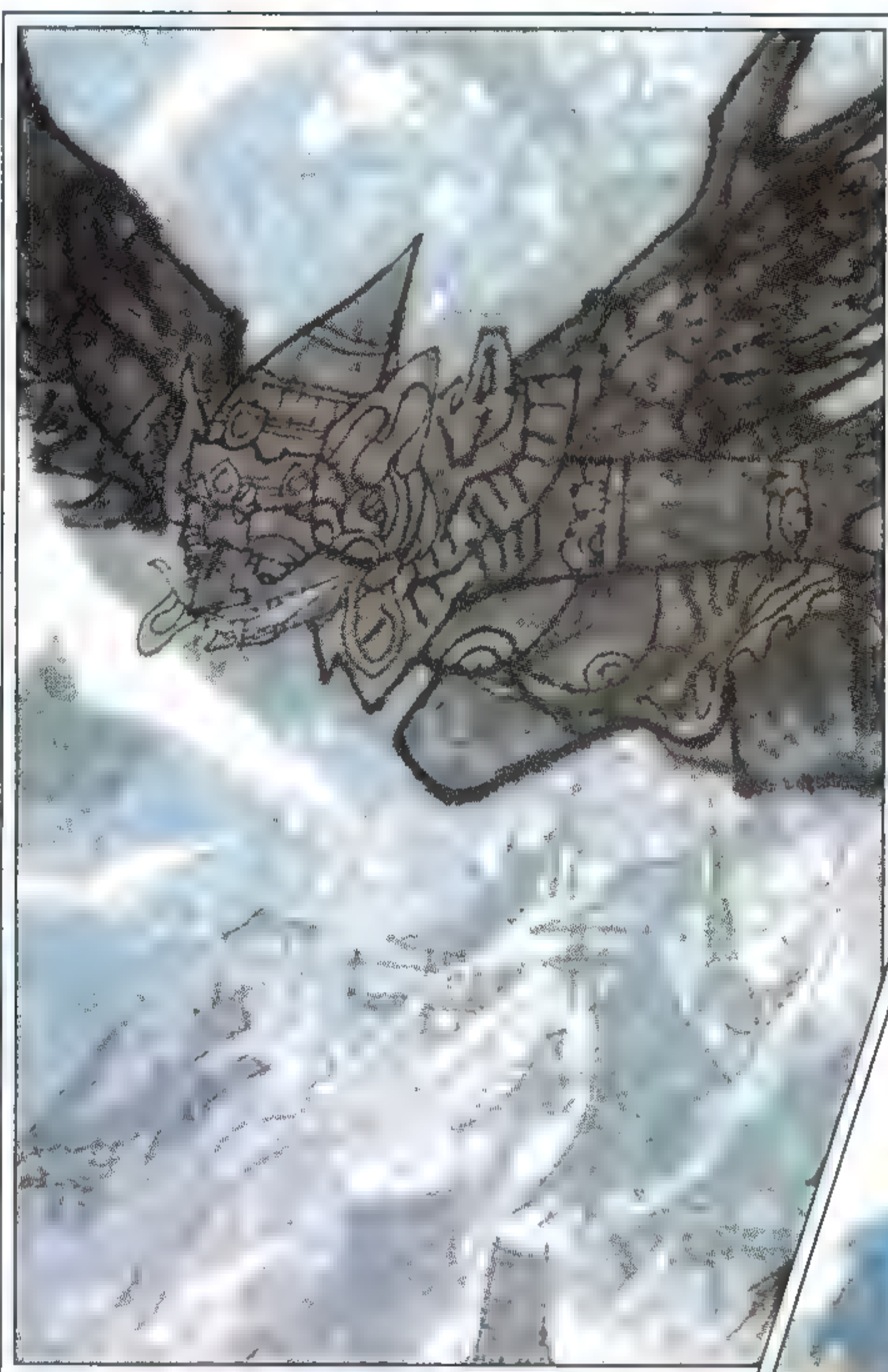
That's the way it happened. Because they raised a crop of spring silkworms, the people in Old Tung Pao's village got deeper into debt. Old Tung Pao's family raised five trays and gathered a splendid harvest of cocoons. Yet they ended up owing another thirty silver dollars and losing their mortgaged mulberry trees — to say nothing of suffering a month of hunger and sleepless nights in vain! E

Translated by Sidney Shapiro

Taken from *Spring Silkworms and Other Stories* and reproduced by kind permission of Foreign Languages Press, Beijing

*The emission of the fluid means the silkworm is about to spin its cocoon.

A Girl and a Demon



A few issues back, we brought you a photographic study of the annual Water-Splashing Festival of the Dai of Yunnan's Xishuangbanna. Here we look at one version of the fable behind this popular festival, which falls in the sixth month of the Dai calendar (generally in April).

Beautiful, lush Xishuangbanna is the home of the Dai and several other minority peoples. They lead a happy life, enjoying their work and singing and dancing.

Long, long ago, however, this land was under the rule of a vicious demon which demanded the most beautiful girl from each village every year. If this was not done, it would destroy the entire village.

By the River Lancang lived a Dai girl named Yu Xiang. Although she was a great beauty, people felt sorry for her because she was destined to be given to the demon. To comfort her grieving mother, Yu Xiang assured her that she would find some way to kill it, despite its supernatural powers which made it proof against all normal weapons.

The time came, and Yu Xiang was taken to the demon. It went wild with delight when it saw her, lovelier than a flower and brighter than the moon. Yu Xiang pretended to be warm and obedient towards the demon.

All the other girls imprisoned by the demon were angry at Yu Xiang's seeming docility. They refused to talk to her. But, all the time, she was hatching a plan in her mind.

ILLUSTRATED BY LOU JIABEN
TEXT BY SHI SHAN




She discovered that the demon had an excessive liking for bamboo wine. One day, Yu Xiang set herself to be even more hospitable than usual, filling glass after glass for the demon. Basking in the beautiful girl's companionship, it drank more than its fill.

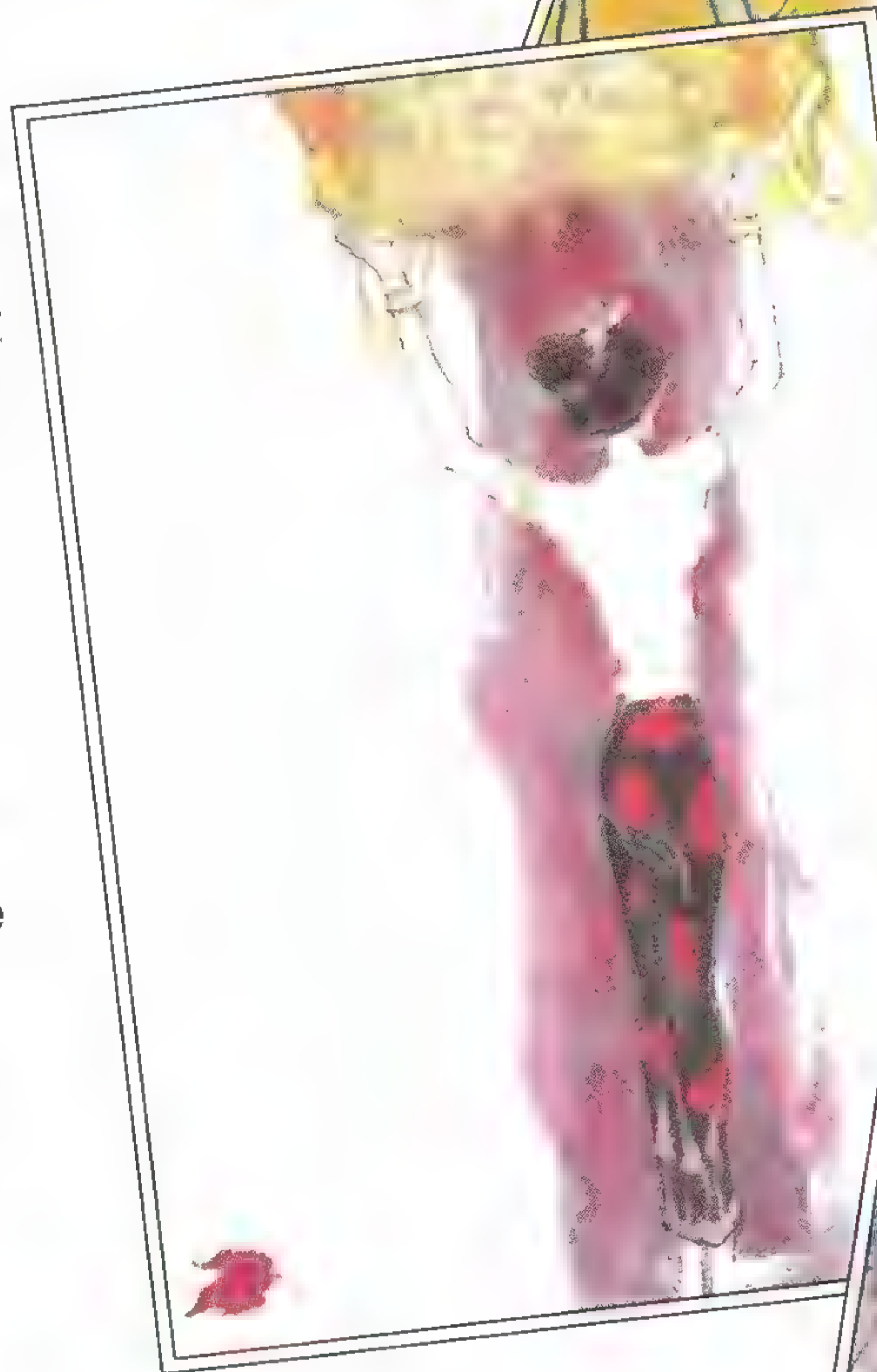
In its drunken state, the demon confided that it had a fatal weakness and made Yu Xiang promise never to divulge the secret, which it revealed to her before falling asleep. Immediately, Yu Xiang acted on her new knowledge; she tied her long hair around the demon's neck and, with a sharp jerk, cut off its head.

So the demon was dead, but its head fell to the ground and turned into a fireball. Wherever the dreadful head rolled, a fire sprang up, endangering all the villages, forests and fields.

Aghast, Yu Xiang fought her way into the flames, seized the demon's head and held it up high, thereby extinguishing the fire. But she herself was soaked with the demon's evil blood.

Still holding the head aloft, she smiled her joy at the jubilant throng as the other girls realized they had wronged her. They repeatedly fetched water from nearby lakes and rivers and poured it over her, hoping to wash away the demon's blood.

And this is why the Dai still splash water over one another at this festival — to celebrate Yu Xiang's victory over the demon, to ward off evil and disaster, and to invoke happiness throughout the year. 



Doing the Silk Road in Style

There are many people in this world who are never happier than when they are travelling. For them it is a magic moment when they board a train, plane, bus or ship at the start of another journey of discovery. The pleasure lies not so much in the reaching of their destination, but in the multitude of things they experience along the way.

In 1985 a group of travel aficionados made a journey which, by any standards, was something out of the common at that time. It comprised a trip across Europe to Asia on the celebrated Orient Express, followed by a journey eastwards along the ancient Silk Road.

The idea for this Orient Express/Silk Road Tour was inspired by the fact that 1985 was said to be the 2,100th anniversary of the Silk Road. The plan for the latter section of the tour was to enter China from Xinjiang — via the back door, so to speak — and travel the ancient route to its starting point in Xi'an, Shaanxi Province.

The tourists, one hundred and three in all, were mostly retired elderly people, one having reached the ripe old age of eighty-five. They came from six countries: the United States, Britain, France, Canada, West Germany and Australia.

The tour started on September 15 1985 in London where, to a farewell by the Chinese ambassador, they boarded a special train at Charing Cross Station. I think it was a Chinese sage who said that the longest journey begins with a single step. Well, stepping into the train that day in the heart of London seemed almost too unbelievably ordinary as the beginning of a journey half-way round the world.

The first leg of the tour by the Orient Express was to take the group as far as Istanbul in Turkey. From London they went to Paris, thence to Vienna, Budapest, Bucharest and finally to Istanbul, the end of the line. From there, by various means, they were to cross the Anatolian Highlands and, by way of the Caspian Sea, take the 'Golden



1

Road' to Samarkand in Uzbekistan. Exactly one month after starting out they were to leave Alma Ata in Kirghizia by bus and head for the Tianshan Range, the great natural barrier which separates China from her Soviet neighbour, in order to enter China.

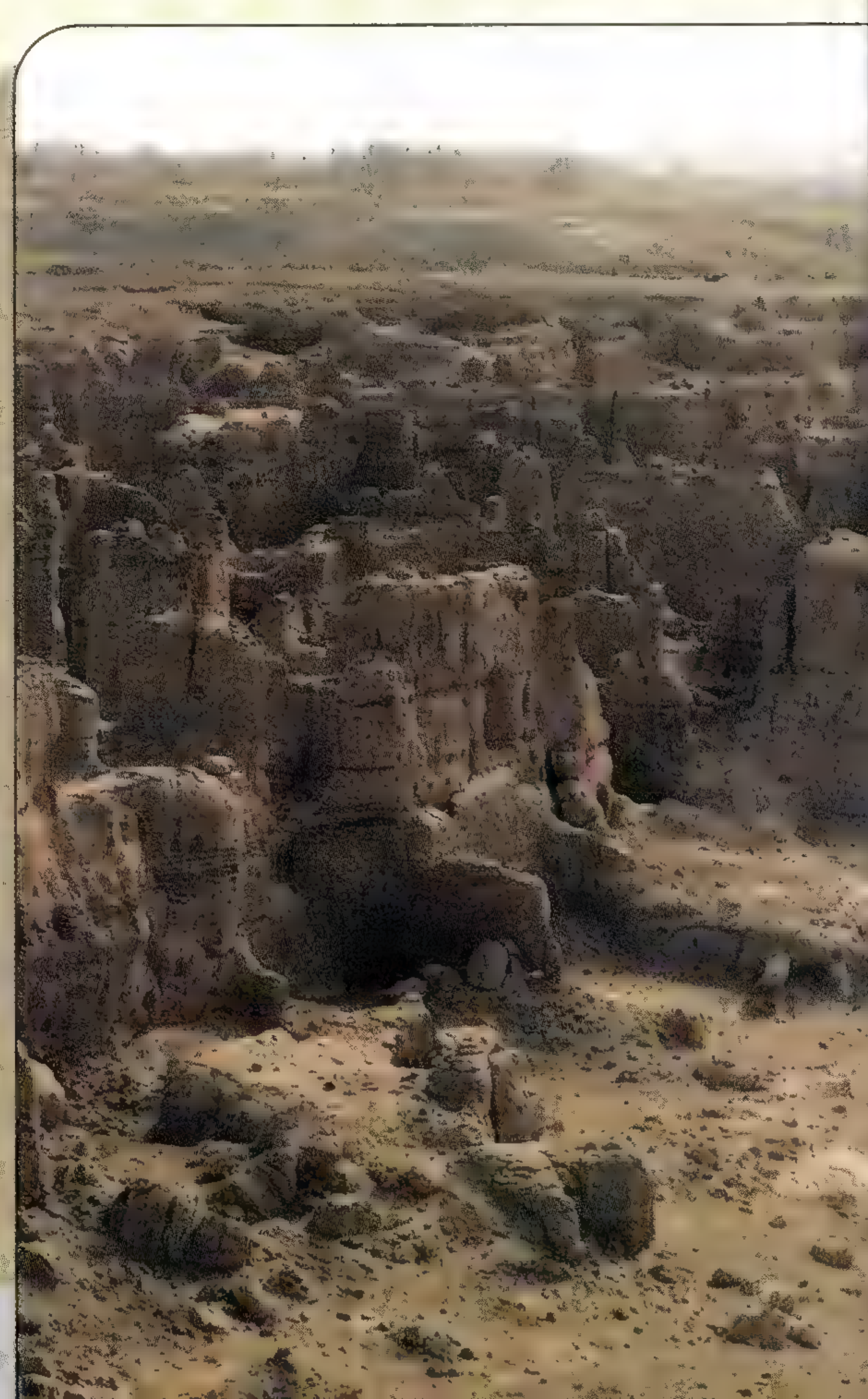
This part of the tour went entirely according to schedule. The group first stepped onto Chinese soil at Huoerguosi in Korgas, part of Xinjiang's Huocheng County.

Driving via Yining, the excited travellers reached Urümqi, the capital of the Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region, on October 17 and were put up at the Kunlun Guesthouse. In typical Xinjiang fashion, the tourists relaxed in a courtyard shaded by trellised grape vines where they were entertained to a concert of singing and dancing put on for them by a Uygur group. A colourful show, it gave the party their first opportunity to learn a little of the culture of this minority nationality.

Urümqi, they were informed, claims to be the most 'inland' city in the world, the



2



furthest away from any major body of water. It was, they soon discovered, a most exotic place with features quite unlike anything they had ever known before. The Moslem influence there was particularly noticeable: in the peoples' dress, in the wares sold in the streets, in the mosques and in the physical characteristics of the inhabitants themselves.

Their stay in Urümqi gave the group members a chance to see the local sights, visit a bazaar and, of course, a carpet factory where the famous Xinjiang carpets are produced.

By special train, the tour group left Urümqi and headed for Turpan to the southeast. This was one of the staging-posts of the Silk Road and it is situated right on the edge of vast deserts.

Perhaps even more than at Urümqi, the Turpan bazaar was a fascinating place with people coming and going all the time on donkey carts; camels stood around patiently or lay down while their masters were busy. The wonderful things sold at the bazaar were a constant source of excitement to the visitors. Beautifully wrought knives, colourful skull caps, veils and shawls, prayer rugs ... the list was endless.

The group found much to capture on film wherever they went and in all they must have used thousands of rolls of film. And not only ordinary cameras were in evidence, for video equipment was also recording the sights and sounds of the journey.

About fourteen kilometres away from

Turpan are the ruins of the city of Jiaohe, an eerie place full of the ghosts of the ancient past. The guide told the visitors that it had been a citadel in Han times, used as an army post to control the border area. It was completely destroyed later by Genghis Khan (1162-1227). Even in its ruined state it was possible to make out some of its architectural layout, including streets and houses and a city gate. The thought must have crossed the mind of more than one of those visitors that day that they were standing in the very spot where countless merchants with laden camel trains had passed in distant days, exchanging the wonders of the West for those of China.

Xinjiang is a vast region with a variety of landscapes. At times the tourists sped past

grasslands stretching away into the distance, at other times through seemingly endless deserts. Distant ranges, snow-capped and formidable, formed occasional backdrops to the passing scene. Here, indeed, they discovered a land of contrasts. And to bring it all to life there was the occasional herd of camels, Uygur people riding on donkey carts going to or coming from who knows where, and shepherds with their flocks.

Soon the travellers crossed the Xinjiang border to Dunhuang in Gansu Province. They were all looking forward to visiting the Mogao Grottoes there, where some of China's most famous Buddhist cave art is to be found.

The grottoes are located some distance from the town, carved out of cliffs in a valley



3



4

The special train (1) and its cheery attendants (2). The eerie ruins of Jiaohe (4), not far from Turpan, were a very different experience than the colourful displays of Uygur culture (3).

between two mountains. For the tour members it was a strange feeling standing inside those caves and realizing that the murals they were looking at had been initiated sixteen centuries earlier, and had been created, under what must have been almost impossible conditions, to propagate ideas which at that time were firing the imagination of much of the Eastern world. Some members of the group — Americans from California — were so captivated by it all that they vowed then and there to return in the future.

The time at Dunhuang was all too short, but there was a schedule to follow and so off they went once more, travelling southeast via the Jiayuguan Pass and down the Gansu Corridor to Lanzhou, capital of Gansu. As they traversed this part of China, it was impossible not to feel the mantle of history wherever they cast their eye.

Overnight stops on the Silk Road section were spent in hotels or hostels and, wherever they put up, they were entertained by singers and dancers performing traditional items. Such cultural displays added another dimension to all that they were experiencing and added greatly to their enjoyment.

Ten days after entering China, the group arrived in Xi'an, once the flourishing capital of no fewer than eleven dynasties.

Xi'an, which in ancient times was called Chang'an, abounds in interesting things to see and the visitors were kept very busy. The high point of their visit was an inspection of the Qin Shihuang Mausoleum where the terracotta warriors are on display. For every single tour member this was an unforgettable experience. The large figures with their military bearing formed an impressive collection; the facial characteristics of each one were totally unlike any other. And they provided additional food for thought: this clay army had already been buried when the Silk Road was opened up over two thousand years ago.



1

Another place on the Xi'an itinerary was a visit to the Maoling Mausoleum of Emperor Wu of the Han dynasty. This, again, proved a fascinating experience.

Xi'an signalled the end of the tour. The travellers had started out in distant London and by fast, modern transport they had travelled along the most famous ancient trade route in the world — a route which countless traders and explorers in distant days, such as Marco Polo, had taken years to traverse.

Just as in London the Chinese ambassador had seen the group off, so a representative from the British embassy was on hand to greet them at the other end.

At journey's end, each member of the group was presented with a finely carved seal bearing the Chinese characters for 'Expert Traveller', as well as a certificate with the tour member's name on it. These small tokens would remain as souvenirs of a remarkable journey.

On October 27 1985, the trip finally ended with a flight to Hong Kong from where these modern-day Marco Polos dispersed, each to his or her own country. The tour had touched twenty-eight cities in ten countries and had covered, in all, 11,200 kilometres, the Chinese section alone accounting for over 3,300 kilometres.

Peter Gardner



2

Camels (1 and 3) — pictured at Dunhuang's Mingsha Dunes — and coaches (2) were just some of the means of transport employed ... and enjoyed!

Photos by Tian Zengyu



3

Silk Roads by Land and Sea

The most famous of China's 'Silk Roads' is undoubtedly that which traversed the northwest of the country. It ran from Chang'an (present-day Xi'an in Shaanxi) via the Gansu Corridor across what are now Gansu and Xinjiang, and thence via Afghanistan, India, Iran, Iraq and Syria to the eastern shores of the Mediterranean Sea. This was the route followed, at least in part, by Chinese explorers such as Zhang Qian

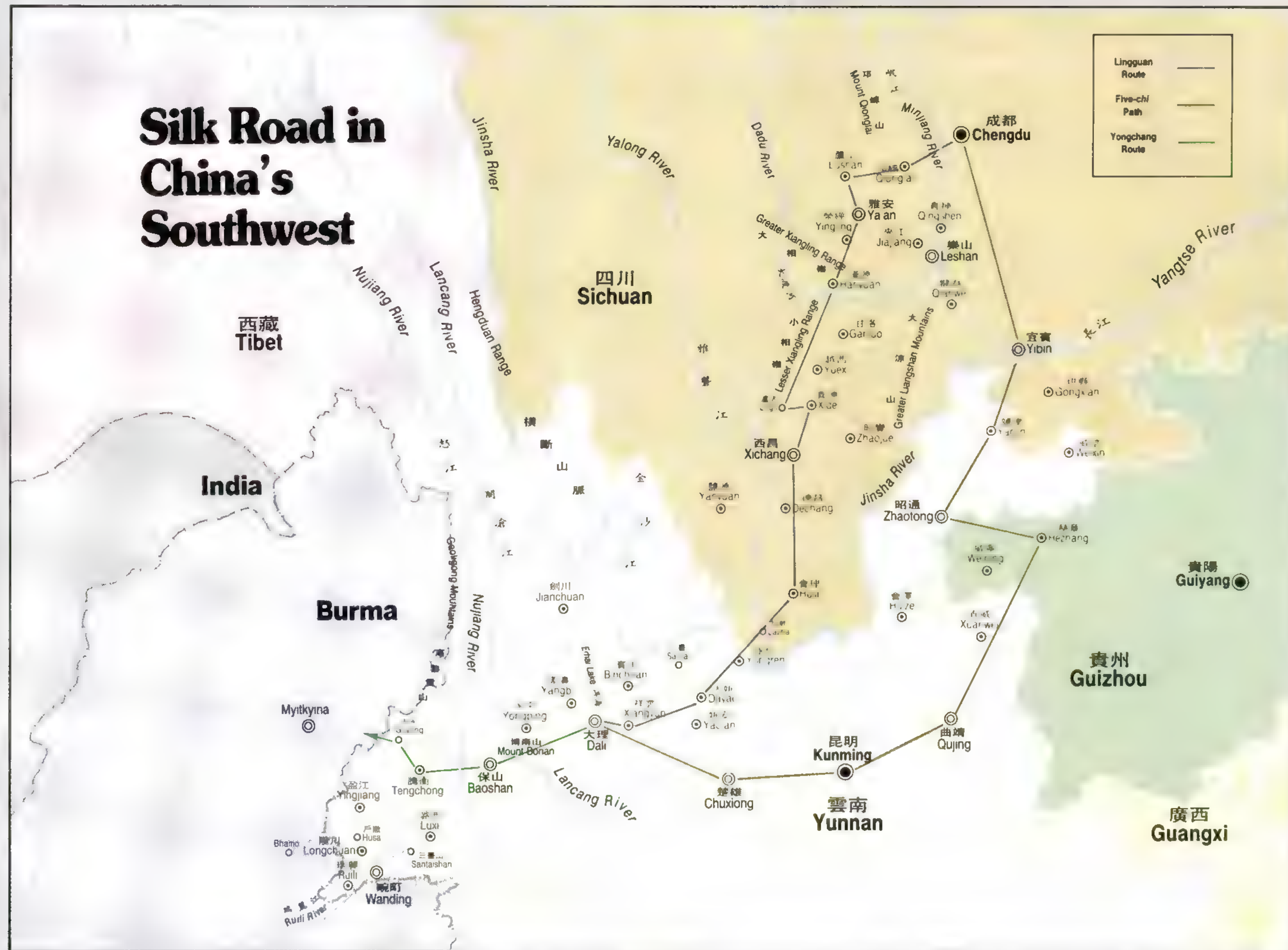
(? -114 B.C.), an envoy of the Western Han, and Ban Chao (32-102), a general of the Eastern Han, as well as the monks Fa Xian (c. 337-422) of the Eastern Jin, who wrote *A Report on the Buddhist Kingdoms*, and Xuan Zang (602-664) of the Tang dynasty, famed for his *Records of the Western Regions*, written on his return after nineteen years abroad. From the reverse direction, this was the route by which the Venetian Marco Polo (1254-1324) first reached China.

Grapes, walnuts, pomegranates, spices and sundry medicaments, jade, lapis lazuli and other precious stones, ivory, fine horses, lions, musical instruments and dances, glass, the technique of colour glazing, the Gregorian calendar, Buddhism, Nestorianism, Islam, and much else was channelled through it to the Chinese court, while exports included silk, bamboo, lacquerware, iron, copper, porcelain and pottery, gunpowder, the technique of paper-making, etc.

At the same time - according to historical sources, probably even earlier - there

existed a route to the southwest, the one we have been examining in this and our previous issue. Called the Shu-Shendu route at the time of the Han dynasty (since it linked Shu - present-day Sichuan - and Shendu - present-day India), it is now referred to as the Southwestern Silk Road. As we have seen, it ran from Chengdu, capital of Sichuan, to the northeastern part of the Indian subcontinent via Yunnan and Burma. Along this route passed silk, gold, paper, ceramics, ironware, lacquerware, salt, tea, etc., while imports included gemstones (jade and pearls among them), cowries and other shells, Burmese-style Buddhism, Burmese music, and so on. Marco Polo travelled this way as an envoy for the Yuan emperor, Kublai Khan, between 1280 and 1290, and has left us much fascinating information in *The Travels*.

There would obviously have been enormous differences in travel along these two routes. In the northwest immense, inhospitable deserts and mountains had to be overcome while, in the southwest, the traveller had to run the gauntlet of dense forests,



torrential rivers and the subtropical climate. Camels were the beasts of burden of the one, horses and mules of the other. However, in both regions, it was mandatory for merchants to travel in convoy, often with an armed escort, since the trade routes ran through territory often only nominally under the control of the central government. Zhang Qian was held captive by the powerful Xiongnu nomads for over ten years while, in the southwest, the trade route was a narrow ribbon traversing lands held by the Yi and by independent kingdoms such as Nanzhao, and passes and strategic points were heavily fortified.

The expense and difficulty of transporting goods over the above two routes were compounded by wars. Gradually, with the development of ship-building, navigation and cartography, a 'Silk Road of the Sea' became established. Although Quanzhou in Fujian was already one of the four major ports of China by the Tang dynasty (618-907), with a large foreign population, the importance of the southeastern seaboard was increased when the Song court was chased from the north by the Liao (916-1125) and Jin (1115-1234), founding the Southern Song (1127-1279). Access to the trade routes further north and west was effectively barred and interest shifted to the south and the southeast (the capital, Hangzhou, was itself a port city).

Quanzhou reached its peak in the Yuan dynasty. Marco Polo calls it Zaiton (its Arab name) '... the port for all the ships that arrive from India laden with costly wares and precious stones of great price and big pearls of fine quality.... And I assure you that for one spice ship that goes to Alexandria or elsewhere to pick up pepper for export to Christendom, Zaiton is visited by a hundred. For you must know that it is one of the two ports in the world with the biggest flow of merchandise.'

Hepu and Beihai in Guangxi and Guangzhou in Guangdong were also major ports for international shipping, with links with the Philippines, Indochina, Indonesia, Ceylon, India, the Persian Gulf, the Red Sea and the coasts of East Africa via the Straits of Malacca. This maritime network of trade routes lasted longer than the other two land routes, and carried - if anything - an even greater range of merchandise: incoming spices, medicaments, ivory, diamonds, rubies and other gemstones, rhinoceros horn, rare woods, exotic poultry and animals were counter-balanced by exports of ceramics, silk, gunpowder, paper, etc. Export ceramics are still being dug up today from archaeological sites all along the coasts of the 'Silk Road of the Sea'.

Burmese Elephants Versus Mongol Cavalry

Marco Polo, the famed Venetian merchant, relates many fascinating things in the *Travels* about the region covered in our Special Features this month. One anecdote is a very detailed (long-winded, in fact!) account of a great battle which took place in the late thirteenth century at a place called 'Vochan', believed to be present-day Baoshan in Yunnan. The Great Khan referred to is of course Kublai Khan, founder of the Yuan dynasty.

In the year 1272 the Great Khan sent a force of 12,000 cavalry under the command of Nasr-uddin 'into the kingdom of Vochan and Kara-jang' (the latter being Polo's name for Yunnan) to guard it against a threatened attack. On hearing of the arrival of this army, the 'king of Mien and Bengal (in the area of Burma), a very powerful monarch in lands and riches and subjects, who was still independent of the Great Khan', decided to march against it and destroy it completely 'so that the Great Khan would never feel inclined to send another army there'.

Apart from fully 40,000 men - mainly cavalry, but also some infantry - the king fielded 2,000 large elephants, on each of which 'was erected a wooden castle of great strength and admirably adapted for warfare. Each of these castles was manned by at least twelve fighting-men, and some by sixteen or more'.

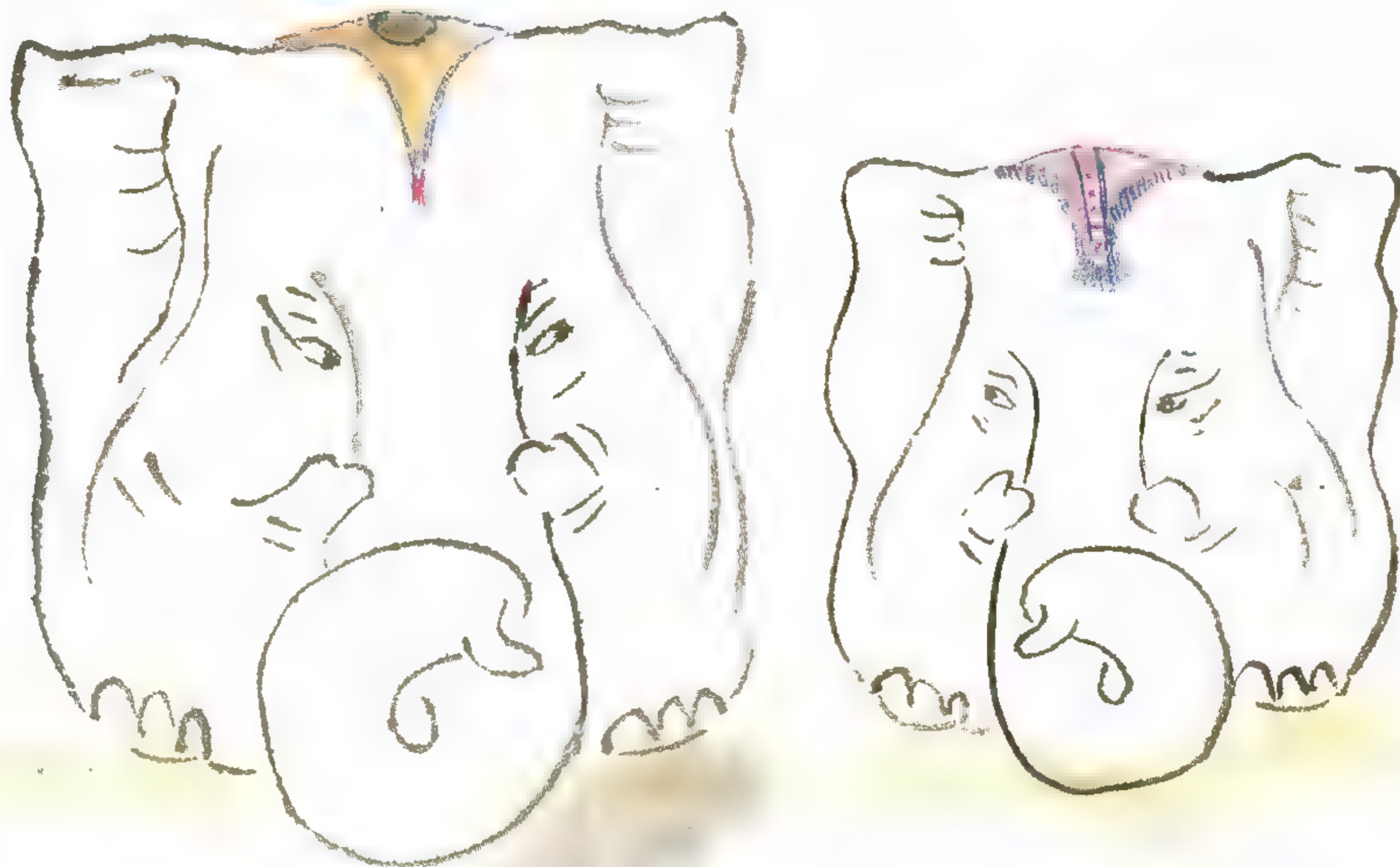
Hearing of the approach of this enormous army, Nasr-uddin decided to enter the plain of Vochan and await the attack. 'And this move was dictated by prudent resolve and wise generalship. For you must know

that on the edge of the plain lay a wide and densely wooded forest.'

Despite the disciplined advance of the Mongols (or Tartars, as Marco Polo calls them), when they were at close quarters and 'nothing remained but to win the battle', their horses were seized with such terror at sight of the elephants that they turned tail and fled. The Mongols were forced to dismount from their panic-stricken horses, lead them into the forest and tether them to the trees. Then they let fly with bows and arrows at the elephants, wounding them grievously, while defending themselves against the king's men.

Eventually the elephants in their turn fled, 'in such a turmoil that it seemed as if all the world were tumbling to bits.' Goaded to frenzy by the pain of the arrow wounds, they threw their own side into confusion as they 'did not stop till they had reached the woods and then they plunged in and smashed their castles and wrecked and ruined everything'.

The Mongols lost no time in leaping back on to their horses and renewing the attack, eventually - after bitter hand-to-hand fighting - routing the Burmese troops. After some attempts at catching the abandoned elephants in the woods, which proved ineffectual, 'for elephants have greater intelligence than any other animal that exists', the Mongols enlisted the help of their Burmese prisoners to capture more than two hundred of the beasts. 'And from this day forward the Khan began to have elephants in plenty.'



THE YI SKIRT

The more than thirty branches of the Yi people show great variations in their costume, which may differ from district to district or even from village to village. One major reason for this is the climate of the area in which the particular branch lives. Except for in the highest mountains, the climate of southwestern China is fairly mild with little seasonal fluctuation in temperature. This means that most Yi people wear the same weight of clothes all year round. All they need to add for the colder months, or at higher altitude, is a heavy woollen cape, primarily the felt *charwa*.

The climate also affects the crops they grow and thus the materials from which they make their clothes. In the Liangshan Mountains in Sichuan, cotton cannot be grown, but there is much keeping of livestock, especially sheep and goats. The self-sufficient Yi in the mountains therefore tend to make clothes from their flocks' wool, weaving the fabric themselves on

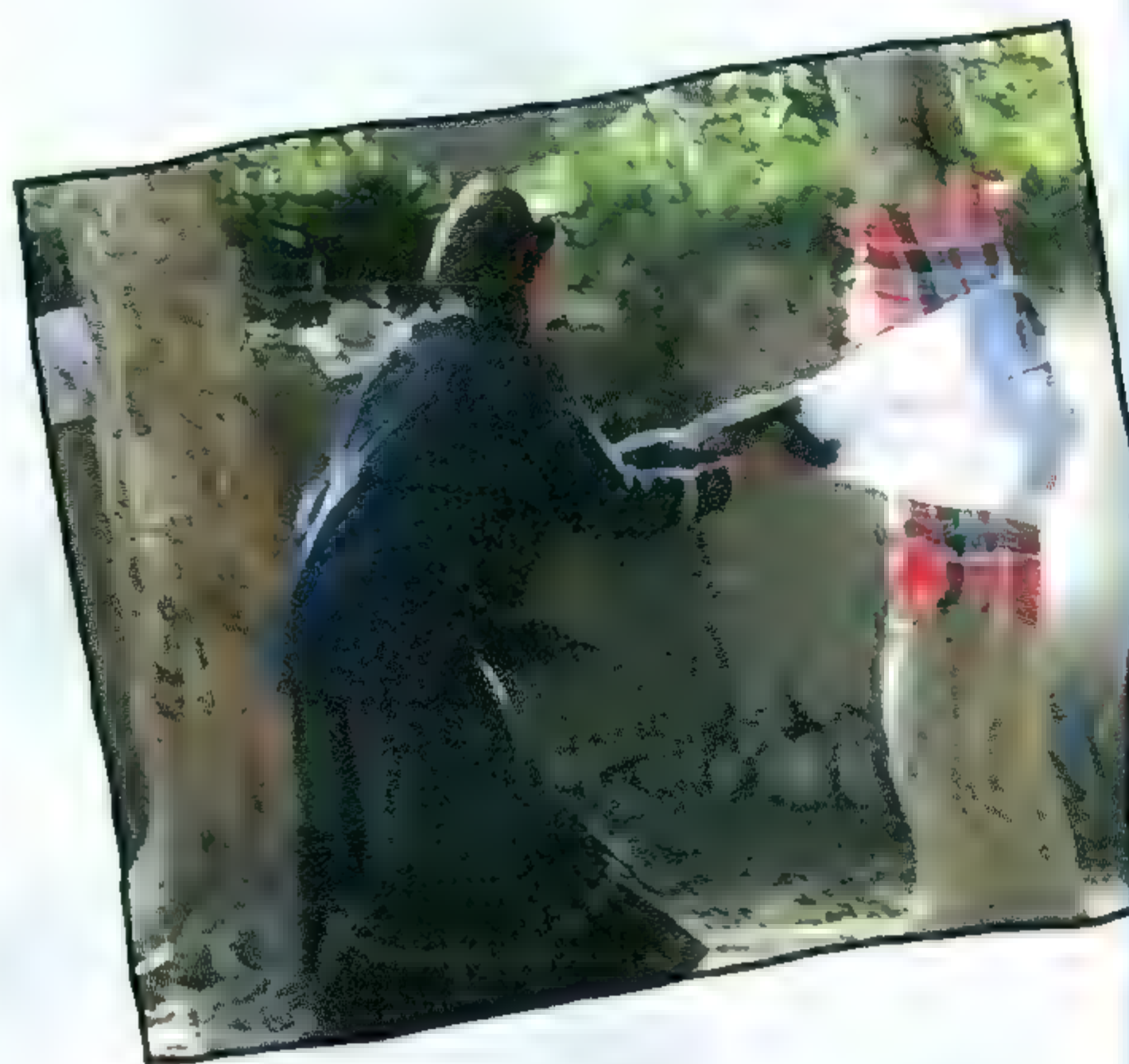
simple backstrap looms. Those living at lower altitudes favour cotton, hemp, and sometimes silk.

Although — as we saw in CHINA TOURISM no. 94 — the dress of the Yi, particularly the women, is a most fascinating subject, it is the skirts which command the most attention. In the Liangshan Mountains, the age of the wearer determines the style and even the colour of the skirt. Little girls wear mainly red and white skirts, or a mixture of several colours,

unmarried young women wear red, blue, white or yellow, while married women favour more sedate combinations of black and blue.

While the children's skirt consists of a tubular top and a pleated bottom, that for adults comprises three tiers. The upper two are bands of different-coloured cloth sewn together to form a tight-fitting tube, the bottom a widely flaring layer with up to ninety-nine pleats. In general, a Yi skirt has between twenty-five and thirty-three pleats, depending on the thickness of the fabric used.

Anything up to seven metres of cloth can be used for the pleated layer, and several layers of skirts may be worn. A gathering of Liangshan Yi women at, for example, their Torch Festival reminds one of Spanish dancers as their ankle-length skirts sway and swirl.



Average Climatic Conditions in Dali

		Jan.	Feb.	Mar.	April	May	June	July	Aug.	Sept.	Oct.	Nov.	Dec.
Dali	Temperature (°C)	8.7	10.6	13.4	16.2	18.9	19.9	20.1	19.3	18.1	15.3	11.6	8.8
	Rainfall (mm)	16.8	25.5	32.1	20.3	66.7	187.9	179.3	229.0	157.4	116.9	34.6	12.4
	Windy days	12.1	12.6	12.5	7.8	1.9	0.4	0.1	0.2	0.0	0.1	2.2	6.1



The Festivals of the Chuxiong Yi



The Chuxiong Yi Autonomous Prefecture lies to the north and west of Kunming in Yunnan Province. Compared with the concentrated Yi society of the Liangshan Yi Autonomous Prefecture in southern Sichuan, the Chuxiong area has a larger variety of branches of the Yi, and is also the home of Miao, Bai, Dai, Hani, Lisu and other minorities. This of course makes for a wealth of colourful festivals. Below we describe some of the most important Yi ones.

The **Dress Competition** takes place on the fifteenth day of the first lunar month (generally in February) at Zhiju in Yongren County. Legend relates that, once upon a time, there were two Yi brothers who came to hunt game in the swamplands of Zhiju. By accident, they discovered that the soil was very fertile and they moved here, followed by other people from their village. That autumn they had a massively successful harvest and became local heroes. To show their gratitude, all the villagers wanted to offer their daughters as brides for the brothers. Seeing that the competition would be fierce (the girls were firmly in love with the brothers already!), each girl set to work to make her clothing as eye-catching as possible. On the fifteenth day of the first lunar month of the following year, they gathered for the brothers to make their choice of bride. The day has been marked ever since with this event.

The Yi girls arrive at the festival site in the early morning, wearing their most beautiful garments. They dance to the sound of the *lusheng*, the ubiquitous bamboo woodwind instrument of southwestern China, thereby showing off their clothes to even better advantage. Some families bring a picnic, others spread out articles of clothing on the branches of trees for others to admire ... and possibly buy. A similar festival is held at Santai in Dayao County on the twenty-seventh to twenty-ninth of the third lunar month.

The **Flower Festival** is held on the eighth day of the second lunar month (generally in March) in the vicinity of Mount Tanhua in Dayao County. Again, a fascinating legend is said to form its basis. According to this, a depraved Han Chinese mandarin once lived in the area. He built a beautiful garden which he said was inhabited by fairies who could teach the most wonderful weaving

and embroidery skills. The credulous Yi villagers sent him their daughters to be instructed, which was his intention — the girls were in fact his prey. But one young girl named Miyilu, as intelligent as she was pretty, thought up an idea to free herself and her fellow captives. She entered the garden with a poisonous flower in her hair and proceeded to charm the tyrant. She later managed to drop the flower, unobserved, into his wine vessel. When the mandarin took a deep draught of his wine, he fell down dead, to general rejoicing. The festival commemorates Miyilu's courageous deed.

On the festival morning, girls and young men gather on the slopes of the 3,600-metre-high mountain to pick flowers, especially the red *Albizia julibrissin*. They hang their booty everywhere: on themselves and their sweethearts, on the horns of cattle and sheep, around horses' ears, on doors and windows of houses and barns. There is often a performance of a folk opera based on the story of Miyilu, a statue of whom stands in a garden in the centre of Chuxiong.

The **Sanyue (Third Month) Gathering** takes place on the twenty-eighth day of the third lunar month (around April) in Mouding County, some sixty kilometres north of Chuxiong. This is basically a fair which gives everybody the chance to buy and sell, but it also gives outsiders a good opportunity to see Yi people in lively holiday mood as they crowd around the shops and stalls. Later in the day, men and women form circles to dance their 'Left-Foot' Dance, continuing deep into the night.

However, the major festival of the Yi, wherever they live in China, is the **Torch Festival**, celebrated on the twenty-fourth day of the sixth lunar month (in July). There are several stories explaining the origin of this festival, which usually lasts for several days. One story tells how the Heavenly Emperor sent a vicious deity down to earth to collect tax and rent from humans. The Yi rose in rebellion and lit thousands of torches to burn down the ladder leading to heaven, trapping and killing the Heavenly Emperor's emissary. This enraged the Heavenly Emperor so much that he sent a plague of insects (locusts?) which ravaged the crops for three days and nights. But the Yi managed to save themselves from ruin by burning the insects off with their torches, hence the Torch Festival.

Chuxiong itself is probably the best place to see the festival. There is dancing, singing, wrestling, a torch procession and a fireworks display. But most interesting of all are the Yi people of many different branches, dressed in costumes displaying incredible variety.

Transport and Lodging

The best base is the town of Chuxiong. It is about 200 kilometres — five hours by road — from Kunming, and bus services link the town with the outlying counties. At festival times, it is advisable to arrive a couple of days early to be sure of finding lodgings. There are hotels in Chuxiong and rather more rudimentary guesthouses in the other county towns.

Past Coverage in CHINA TOURISM

- No. 47 Yunnan Special (Yunnan's Scenic Glories, Dali, Kunming, Ruili, Yi Flower Festival, Zheng He's Hometown)
- No. 54 Marriage Rites of the 'Fancy Belted' Dai
- No. 59 Tengchong — Home of Volcanoes
- No. 60 Houses of the Bai People
- No. 61 Western Yunnan Special (Into a Restricted Frontier Region: Travels in West Yunnan)
- No. 72 Xishuangbanna Special (child monks, Miao temples, the Dai and their beliefs, Homeland of Minorities, Three Days in a Dai Village, Xishuangbanna's rain forest)
- No. 86 Into Out-of-the-Way Places: Three Months in Yunnan
- No. 91 Dai House-Warming Ceremony
- No. 95 Celebrating Mohammed's Birthday
- No. 100 Awa Mountains — Abode of the Va
- No. 105 The Making of Child Monks
- No. 108 Yunnan's Hengduan Range Special (including: Into the Gorge of the Nujiang)
- No. 117 Tile Cats, Yunnan Style

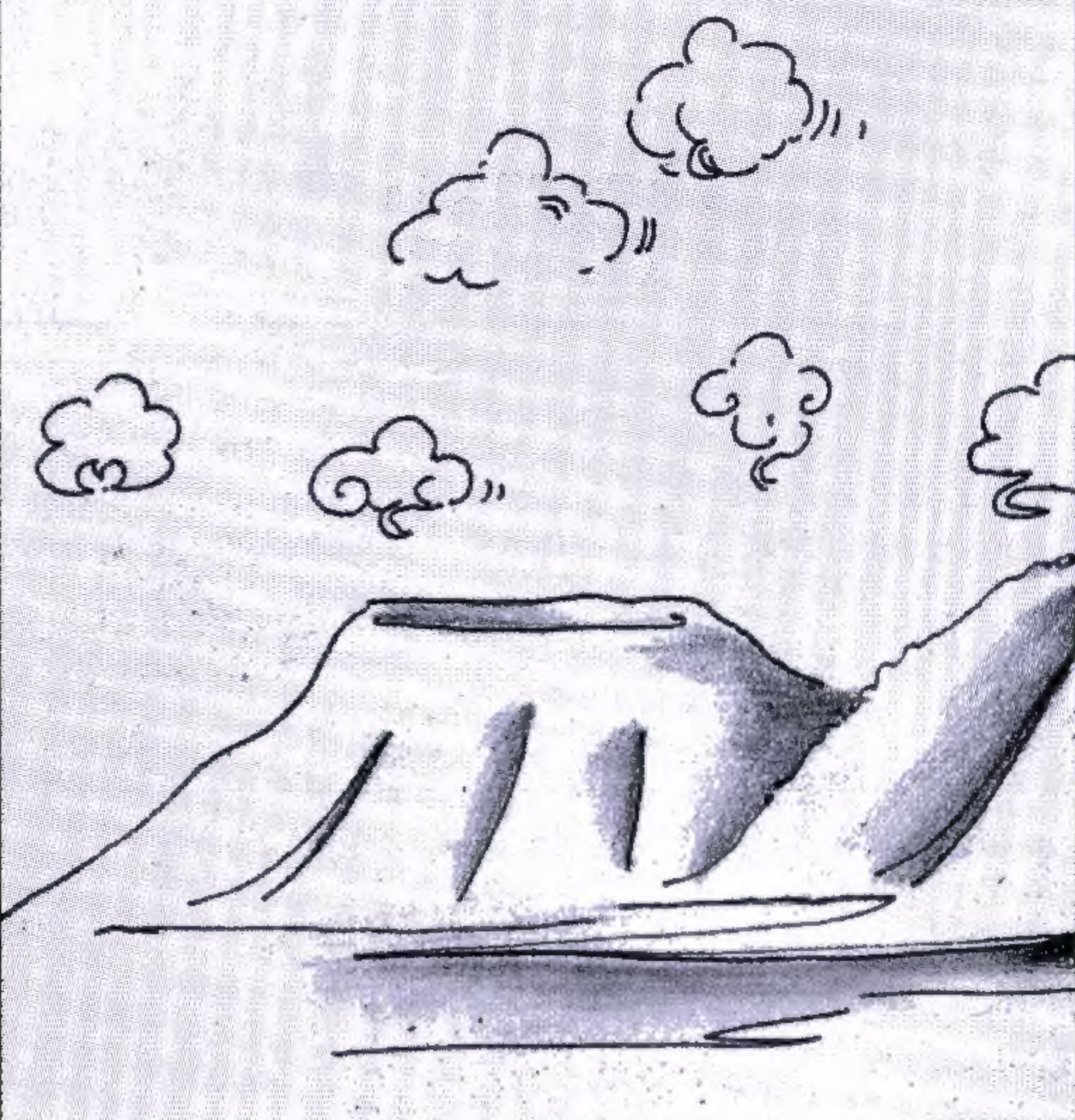
Tengchong's Volcanoes

In the region of the Sino-Burmese border in Yunnan Province, there is an extensive zone of volcanic and subterranean thermal activity said to be one of the largest in China. Volcano cones, more than forty of them, dot the plain for an area of around 200 square kilometres, radiating out from the county town of Tengchong. This assembly of cones is what was left after the last eruption three hundred years ago. The cones, which are mostly inactive today, have become a tourist attraction, and the local authorities have constructed several hotels nearby.

There is also a sanatorium here, since this zone is associated with more than eighty hot springs. Some of the springs issue from the earth at almost boiling point — 96°C. Bathing in the hot springs speeds up the metabolism, but is also said to have a relaxing, sedative effect which calms nervous disorders.

Geologists believe that there were originally seventy-three volcanoes at Tengchong, but this number has been whittled down by erosion and by agricultural activities. Classified according to shape, the volcanoes fall into four categories:

- Pyramidal: These are true 'cones' with a conical profile, and rise 500–600 metres from the plain;
- Upside-down bowl: 300–500 metres high, these are flattened on top; there may be a crater inside;
- Sugar-loaf: Tall and narrow, they rise 300 metres or so, but the top is fairly flat; usually there is no crater;
- Shield-shaped: These are low cones up to 100 metres high with gentle slopes — the most affected by erosion.



NEXT ISSUE

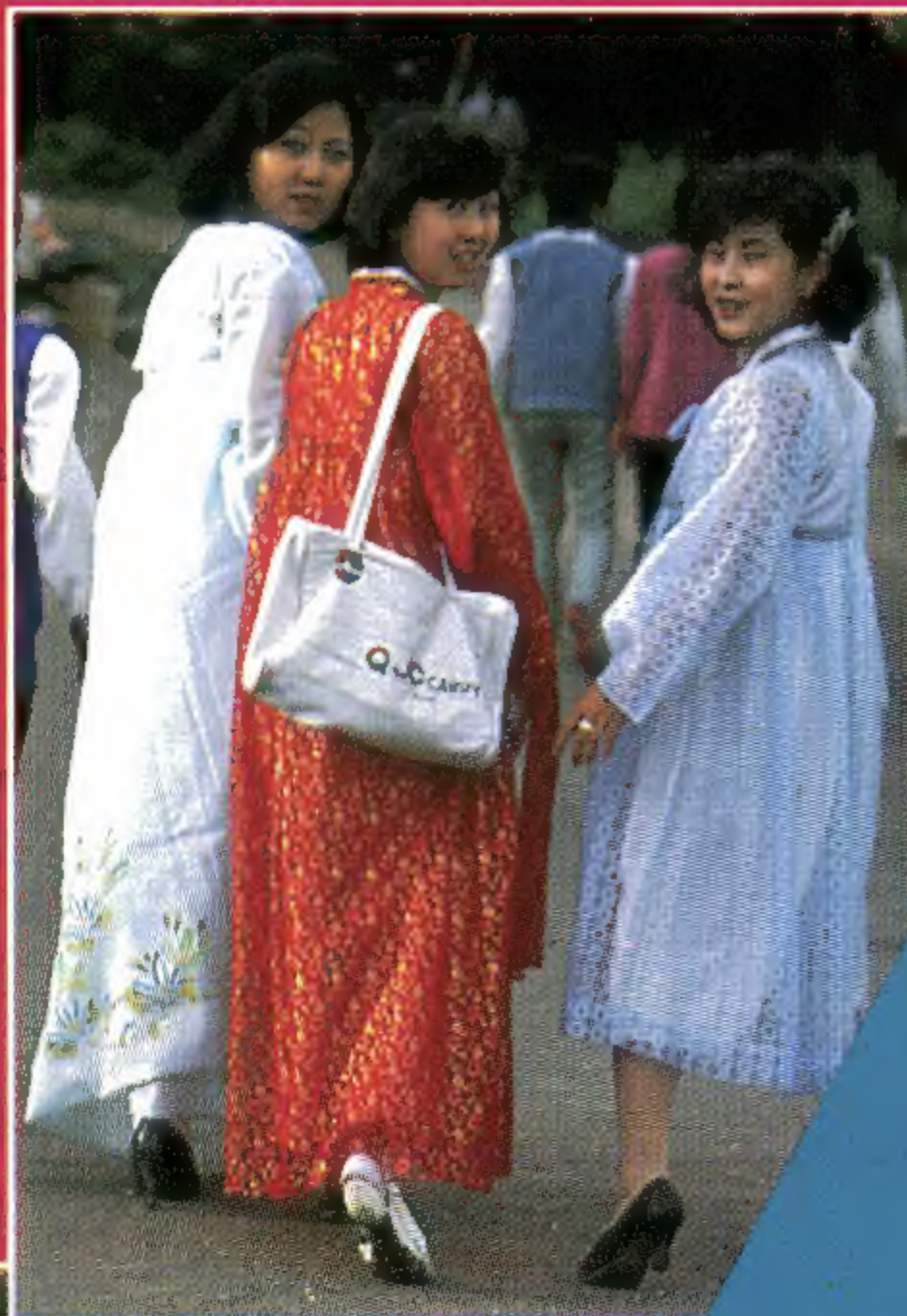
10th ANNIVERSARY+ BORDER CROSSINGS SPECIAL

To celebrate a major milestone in our history — ten years of CHINA TOURISM! — we bring you an issue with a difference. Staff members and special correspondents travelled north, south, east and west on journeys which took them through and beyond China's borders, demonstrating a range of possibilities which would have been unimaginable a few years ago:

• An Impromptu Trek in the Rain



• A Secretive Land Lifts the Veil



• By Motorbike Along China's Borders — The Odyssey Continues



• Laoshan in Time of War



• A 'First' from Yining to Alma-Ata



• To Ulan-Ude, Home of the Buryats

• Central Asian Adventure: Kashi to Kirgizia



• Glimpses of the Soviet Far East





Palace Museum Special Exhibition

Wenhua Hall in the east wing of Beijing's Palace Museum, as the Forbidden City is now known, is the venue for an exhibition featuring 300 articles of high historical and cultural interest from all over China. The exhibition will run for six months from June 1990. It includes priceless antiques, but also objects such as the four-million-year-old apeman's skeleton discovered not long ago in Yunnan Province.



International Folk Arts Festival

From August 14-30, the Chinese Federation of Literary and Art Circles is holding an International Folk Arts Festival. Troupes from twelve countries are expected to participate in the festival, performing in Beijing for five days and presenting two open-air shows before performing in Beijing's suburbs. Afterwards, the groups of foreign artistes will split up, some going to the Haicheng International Folk Arts Festival in Liaoning, others visiting Chengde, Tangshan and Qinhuangdao in Hebei for their local festivals.



New Air Routes

A route has been opened up between Dalian, the port city in Liaoning Province, and Chongqing in Sichuan. There is one flight a week in either direction, the MD-82 plane used taking about three hours to complete the 1,961-kilometre trip.

Jiangxi provincial authorities have announced the imminent launch of two new routes: one between Ganzhou and Guangdong's Guangzhou, with two flights a week; and one flight a week on the Nanjing-Jiujiang-Shanghai route. Ganzhou and Jiujiang are major industrial centres in Jiangxi Province and Jiujiang is also the point of access for Mount Lushan.



China Travel Promotion

The 1990 China Travel Fair will take place in Shanghai's Exhibition Centre from October 7-10. Tourism agencies from thirty cities and provinces will be promoting existing tourist resources and presenting new tour possibilities. Foreign companies and parties interested in aspects of Chinese tourism have been invited to take part. Before and after the fair, a programme of activities is planned for the entertainment of foreign visitors.



Gearing Up for the Asian Games

Beijing's hotels are bracing themselves for an influx of athletes and tourists with the approach of the 11th Asian Games, which will last from September 22 to October 7. With 117 hotels already in operation and 28 more due to open by August, the city's authorities are instituting rigorous training programmes for hotel staff to ensure good service at all levels.

Many cities apart from the capital plan to introduce new tourist attractions or upgrade existing ones in time for the Asian Games. Xi'an, capital of Shaanxi Province, for example, is staging China's first International Fireworks Competition at that time, and in July is opening a road between the tomb of the Tang Empress Wu Zetian (624-705) and the famous Famen Monastery (see CHINA TOURISM no. 97). In addition, a bridge is to be built over the No. 1 pit at the museum housing the world-famous terracotta warriors so that visitors can get a better view; photography will also be permitted at designated points.

In other parts of the country, a series of China Travel Fair '90 exhibitions are being held to coincide with the 11th Asian Games, and Beijing, Shanghai and Guangzhou plan a China Tourist Shopping Festival from late September to early October.



'Hongkong Food Plaza'

A building in southern Chinese style has recently been completed in Wangfujing Street in the heart of Beijing. It is known as 'Hongkong Food Plaza', and it can hold up to 1,000 patrons. Twenty varieties of cuisine, both Chinese and Western, are on offer on its four floors, and there is also a cake shop which can make a birthday cake within one hour. On the fifth floor there are bars, dance halls, karaoke establishments, etc.



International Credit Card Issued

The first MasterCard in Chinese currency has been launched by the People's Construction Bank of China in Guangzhou, capital of Guangdong Province. The bank joined the International MasterCard Organization in November last year, the second mainland member after the Bank of China. Available in two forms — one for enterprises, the other for individuals — the card is only being issued in Guangzhou for the time being but can be used in any city where there is a Bank of China. MasterCard is currently accepted at about 3,000 outlets in China.



New Silk Road Tour

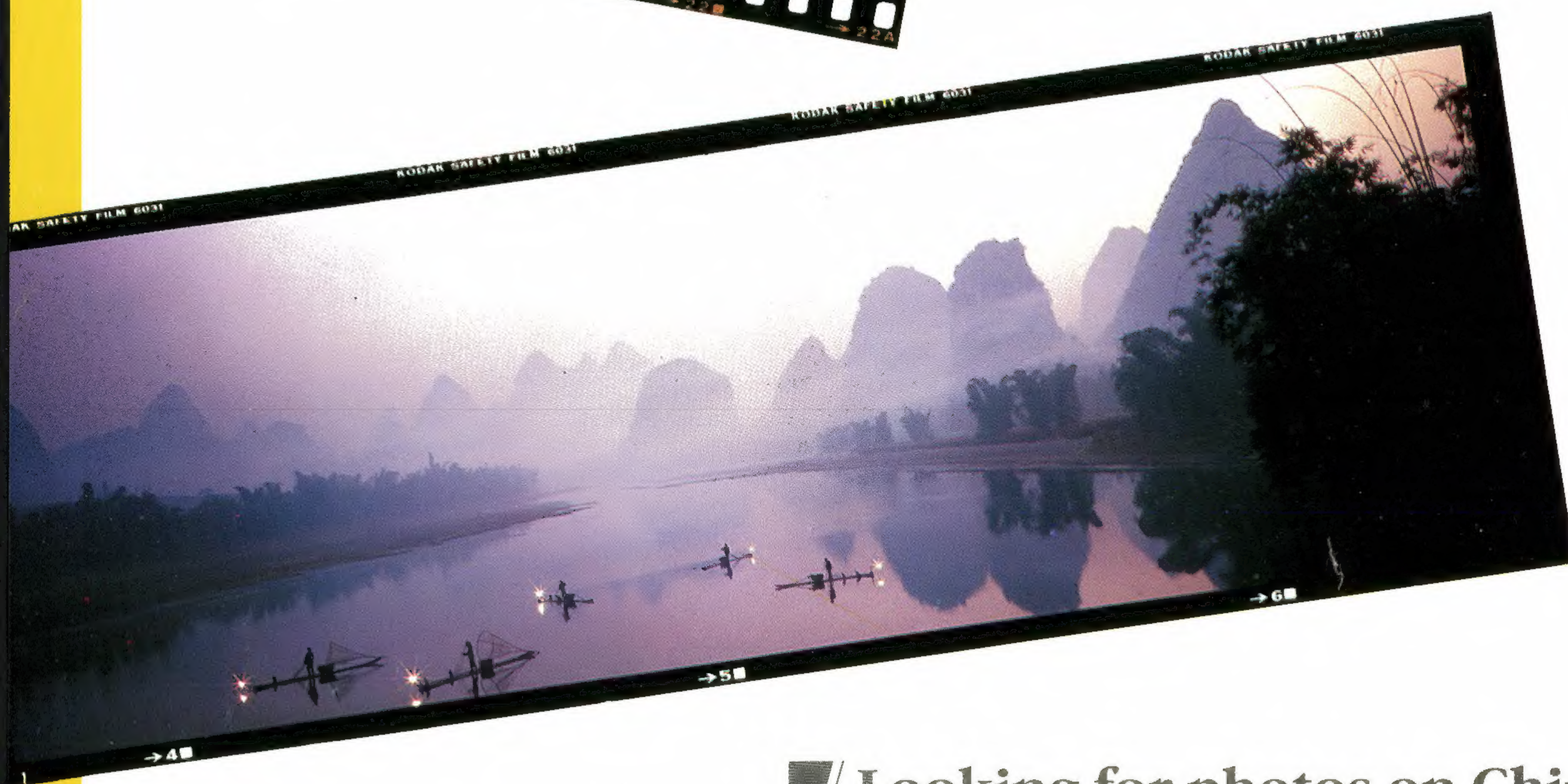
Tourism agencies in Xi'an, Shaanxi, and Hangzhou, Zhejiang, as well as in Gansu and Xinjiang have launched a new tour along the ancient Silk Road in northwestern China. From Hangzhou, the tour goes to Xi'an, the start of the Silk Road. It continues via Lanzhou and Dunhuang in Gansu to Turpan and Ürümqi in Xinjiang. Programmed in are visits to silk-production centres, Xi'an's terracotta warriors, the murals at the Mogao Grottoes in Dunhuang and much, much more.

The tourism authorities involved are publicizing this tour in Europe and the United States, and point out that there will be charter flights from Nagoya in Japan direct to Hangzhou once the current expansion of the airport to accommodate Boeing 747-400 jumbo jets has been completed.



Introducing Hotel Concourse

China Travel Hotel Management Services Hong Kong Ltd. has just opened its fourth hotel in Hong Kong — the Hotel Concourse. Located in Mongkok, the hotel boasts 445 rooms and has a Chinese restaurant, coffee shop, bar-cum-lounge and cake shop. To celebrate its soft opening, the hotel is offering a special package until September 30 1990. This includes accommodation in a superior-grade room, welcome cocktail, American breakfast, morning newspaper, complimentary tea and coffee, fruit basket, extended check-out, and discounts on laundry and drycleaning services. The package is HK\$599 each (double occupancy) or HK\$1,099 (single occupancy) for a three-day/two-night stay.



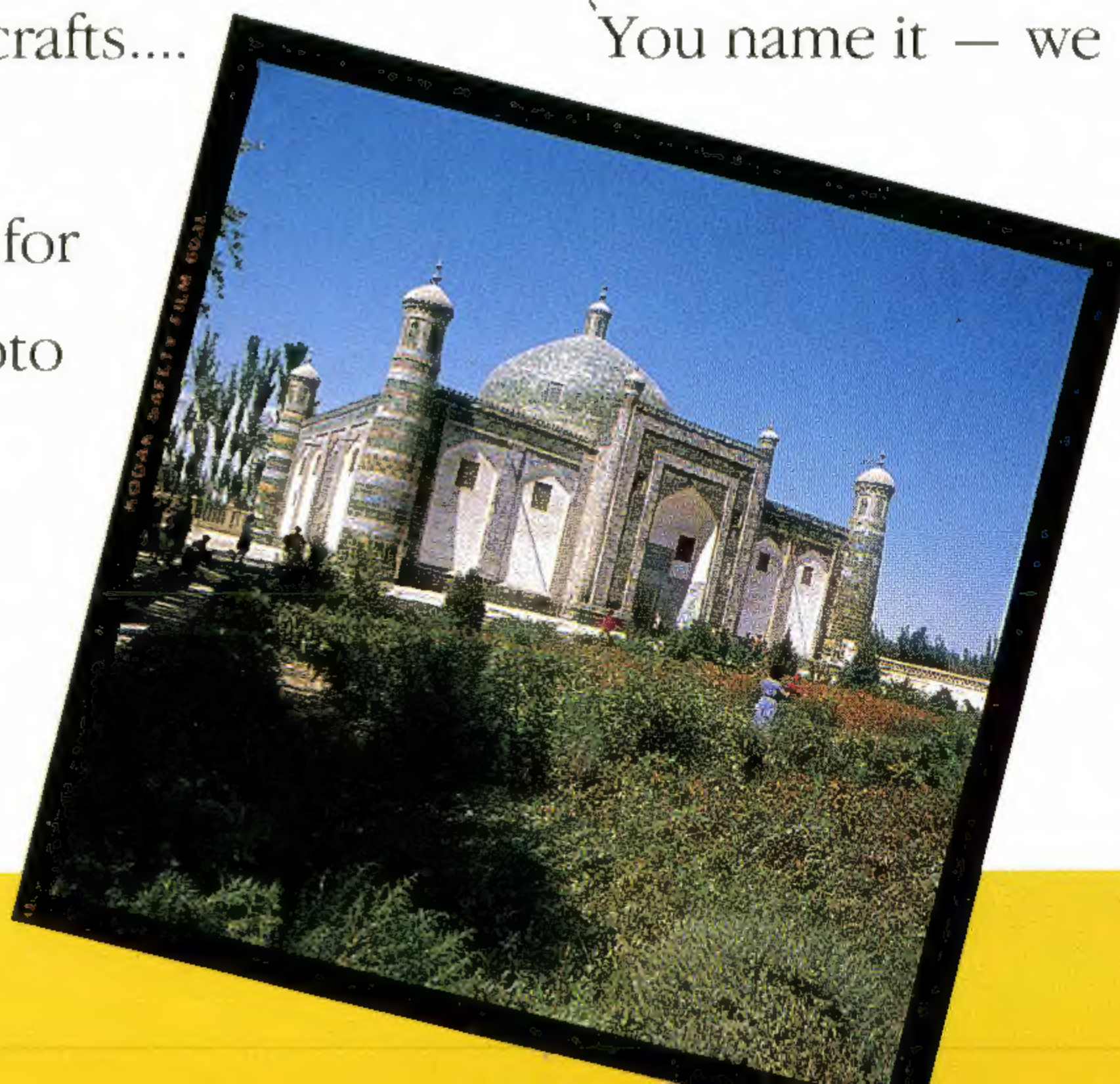
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